

D. Litt. Thesis, 1929.

J O H N M I L T O N.

The Making of an Epic Poet.

by

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The query: whence did the poet derive such and such a thing, applies only to the question what; of the how no-one can find out anything.

Goethe.

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INTRODUCTION.

Who is there that will maintain that we have Virgil or Homer before us when we read the words which are attributed to the one or the other? We have the writers of those words before us, and what more do we require?

Goethe.

Poetry, whatever else it may be, is a means of expression. A poet is a man who says something in a particular way. If we would know therefore why he should say certain things or why he should regard certain questions from a particular angle, we shall do well to study his biography. Thus we may get to know the circumstances which suggested the idea to him or the series of experiences which led to his adopting his own characteristic point of view. This is true of all poets; particularly is it true of certain poets of the nineteenth century. Of these, Wordsworth may be cited as an outstanding, if not quite typical, example. A knowledge of Wordsworth's biography is essential for any reasonable study of his works, and his critics, for the most part, have been fully sensible of this - so sensible indeed that, at times, it is difficult to say where criticism begins and biography ends. Some-

times it might even appear that the two had changed places. Wordsworth's poems are so much the expression of his own personality and of his own peculiar habits of mind, that this personality has to be accepted as the inevitable connecting link between them. The only satisfactory arrangement of the poems for critical purposes is the arrangement best fitted to exhibit the complete personality of their author. And so, in a sense, instead of using the personal biography of Wordsworth as a means of increasing one's appreciation of his works, most studies of Wordsworth present rather the appearance of merely utilizing those works for the light they throw on Wordsworth's character. A résumé of Wordsworth's early life and mental development, interspersed with passages from The Prelude selected for quotation and special approbation, is accepted as an adequate treatment of that poem. And rightly so, for no critic who was not sympathetically interested in Wordsworth's early life and mental development would choose to write about that poem at all. Nor would any reader, not similarly interested, choose to read it.

Wordsworth's, no doubt, is an extreme case, and The Prelude an exceptional poem. But The Prelude is the essential poem of Wordsworth, and Wordsworth is not only

the greatest poet since Milton but the one who has done most to shape our conceptions of poetry. His opinions were not of the merely brilliant kind which cover just enough of the subject to be grasped at a single reading, sufficiently striking and tangible to become the manifesto of a "movement" but liable to be discarded when that movement has ceased to be fashionable. They are too deep and far-reaching. They go so far indeed that there is a danger of our thinking that they go farther than they do, that they do in fact settle the whole question. Wordsworth himself was sometimes tempted into taking short cuts in order to weld them into a complete and consistent whole. In the matter of poetic diction, for example, he seriously misrepresented his own position in hastily connecting it with his fundamental doctrine of man's relationship to nature.

We have learned from Wordsworth that the poet's mind is of more importance than the abstract rules with which criticism formerly concerned itself. The rules did not make the poem and cannot help us to grasp its intention. This we can approach more probably by knowing the necessities and experiences which the poet himself felt. Yet we must beware of supposing that the manner of the growth of the

poet's soul is fixed for ever and for all poets by The Prelude. It was Wordsworth's peculiar function to be natural. After the doctrine-mongering of the eighteenth century with its absurd belief in good-sense and fine sentiment as the essence of human character, it was necessary that a man should come who could teach us something of the primary things, the irrational impulses, the unexplainable loyalties and exaltations which make us what we are. Wordsworth takes us to the simple facts of human experience, and consequently it was important that he should have his being among the simple facts of human experience. He would reveal to us Beauty as a living presence of the earth, a simple produce of the common day. Therefore to appreciate his teaching we must enter into his daily life. We must love him ere he seem worthy of our love.

But to expect this of all great poets is to err greatly. The critical method of placing the man first, the work second, and the author nowhere has of course certain advantages. It is the obvious way of dealing with companionable writers like Pepys or the essayists. It is not always, however, the best way of approaching the high art of poetry: it can do so much

for any author whose life and letters make good copy provided that he has run to verse on enough occasions to supply a sprinkling of illustrative quotations, and so little for the man whose claims to critical recognition are chiefly founded on his having written some of the greatest poems in the world.

It is perhaps unfortunate, therefore, that the critics of Milton have so often made the man rather than his works the centre of their discourse. They have realised, of course, that Paradise Lost must be considered in another light than that of a dossier of biographical material. Yet even so, they have not always been fortunate in their methods. Personal biography is an interesting theme which can be pursued in the easy, discursive vein of the essay writer. Memoirs, so the circulating libraries report, are second only to novels in popularity. Assuredly, therefore, the gentle reader cannot but feel himself aggrieved to be plunged suddenly into such purely technical discussions as his author may choose ^{to raise} in the treatment of Paradise Lost. The author may try to relieve the tedium thereof by treating these matters lightly, even flippantly. If he does so, he will leave his readers with the impression that Paradise Lost is a

totally ridiculous poem. In any case his readers will resent the loss of that human interest which has held their attention thus far, and will conclude that Paradise Lost is a poem devoid of significance for the normal reader.

Others, more wise, have kept Paradise Lost in mind throughout. Though not treating the poem itself from a purely biographical point of view, they have made biographical deductions from it which govern their whole treatment of Milton. In order to give unity to their work and to facilitate the transition from biography to the consideration of Paradise Lost, they have reconstructed Milton's character throughout in the light of that poem. The Milton who wrote rhapsodically to Diodati about the pretty girls he had seen, the Milton who made silly speeches in college on convivial occasions, the romantic young man who raved about an Italian prima donna and afterwards rushed into an imprudent marriage, the most Horatian of English poets who invited Lawrence to take wine with him, and was reputed to be the life and soul of every company he was in - these are phases of the man's character which receive somewhat inadequate treatment at their hands. The Milton they present to us is a purely hypothetical and not extremely attractive figure, and, it

may be added, an entirely impossible one.

The truth of the matter is that it is impossible to imagine any man, out of whose life Paradise Lost could issue forth naturally and without greatly modifying what would otherwise be its author's normal way of living. Milton, it is too readily forgotten, was a man like other authors. We cannot imagine any man living his life entirely on the hypothetically Miltonic plane. The mood which finds utterance in Paradise Lost was not always present. It had to be studiously cultivated, and we have Milton's own authority for stating that it could be successfully cultivated only at certain seasons. Consequently any portrait of Milton based on Paradise Lost is misleading.

To say this, however, is not to deny the all-pervading egoism of Milton. "John Milton," said Coleridge quite truly, "is in every line of Paradise Lost." He was in fact probably the most egoistic of our poets. But his egoism is not Wordsworth's egoism, which is self-complacency; nor Pope's, which is vanity; nor Pepys's, which is childishness. It is an egoism of his own, compounded of many simples. He did not find himself and the impressions of his own mind so interesting that he could write about no-

thing else. He did not merely allow himself to go on living, and now and then avail himself of the licence of ink to tell people about it. If Milton himself appears in all his works, it is not because his works are about himself, but because, to speak colloquially, he "put himself" into his works. He devoted himself to the production of his works. Consequently the Milton who appears in them is not the man Milton, but the author Milton - Milton, not altogether as he was, but rather as he thought he ought to be and as he continually tried to be. We might say with some degree of truth that Wordsworth would have lived his life in the same way and have developed the same traits of character if he had never written a line. He himself believed that there were many mute, inglorious Wordsworths among his native lakes. But a mute, inglorious Milton would be no Milton at all. One of the essential qualities of a Milton is that he should have taken great pains to insure that he should not be mute nor inglorious.

The story of Voltaire's visit to Congreve is well-known, and illustrates admirably the two different attitudes which literary men have adopted towards their art. Voltaire, the man of letters par excellence, can

imagine no higher ambition or surer title to fame than that achieved by single-hearted devotion to literature. Congreve, on the other hand, considers that the aim of the artist should be to try to lead a perfectly natural sort of life like that of the people around him, to act and talk as if literature was the last thing in the world he cared for, to avoid bookishness of any sort. In this matter Milton was entirely of Voltaire's way of thinking, although, as will appear, he regarded the question from a somewhat loftier point of view. Ordinary men, he knew, do not usually produce masterpieces, and the greatest artists have not usually lived the leisurely and expansive lives of gentlemen. He who would achieve great things must be prepared to live laborious days. "Miltonic verse," complained Keats, "cannot be written but in an artful or, rather, artist's humour." What wonder then, when critics come to extract from Milton's verse the character of their author, if they present us with nothing more than the picture of a humorous artist. And how unsympathetic does such a character seem to a generation which has become accustomed to a series of delightfully human portraits of literary men who lived perfectly normal lives, fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the

same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as the rest of us.

Milton, we are to consider, lived a long time ago. Like most of the men of his day, he had not learned to regard poetry as material for the construction of literary biographies. The Aeneid, The Iliad, the works of the Greek tragedians interested him not because of the light they threw on the personalities of their authors, but because they represented the highest achievements of a certain abstract thing called poetic art. This art was a thing of much greater importance to the world at large than the life and personality of any particular poet. It was the highest development of human endeavour, the expression of the loftiest and most ennobling aspirations of mankind. The greatest privilege for any man was to be allowed to devote himself to its service; to learn all that had been accomplished in the way of technique by his predecessors and to improve upon it if possible; to devote all the skill thus acquired to fresh and, to the best of his ability, to better and loftier purposes. Nor was this command of technique the only benefit to be derived from such a study. Milton believed that literature served a useful purpose on earth, and that it was worth anyone's

while to read such people as Homer or Virgil or Dante. From them we might gain an abiding impression of the greatness of things, an aspiration towards nobler ideals, a widening of our range of imagination. And if this be true of the ordinary reader, how much more so of the artist, who is supposed to be more sensitive to impressions of this sort.

The attitude of most people in our time is directly opposed to this. Over-much study of other men's works has been found to be no incentive to creative effort. In fact, with increase of knowledge, the creative instinct often wanes. And here the names of Gray and Matthew Arnold are dragged in to provide concrete illustration of the thesis propounded. The contention is very sound, and raises an interesting and subtle question in human psychology. If this objection had been raised in Milton's hearing, however, it is not likely that he would have wasted much refinement of speculation in replying thereto. He had no great love of psychological complexities, and when he encountered them in the controversial attitude of an opponent, his method of reply was not quite so delicate as one could wish. In this objection, probably, he would have seen no more than a confession of the objector's in-

ability to produce anything really original or to achieve anything better than had been produced before. He would have seen no hardship in this. If a man cannot add something really new to the stores of literature, if he can only be persuaded of the originality and freshness of his own ideas by virtue of his ignorance of what others have done, far better would it be for him to preserve a blameless silence. Milton himself was always sure that, even after he had read all that he could of the great men who had gone before, he would still find what he wanted to say was worth saying. In fact when his preparation was complete, and he had actually started on his great poem, he could declare that his own subject was greater than anything before attempted. Such arrogance bespeaks, at least, a vital and overwhelming interest in his theme, and a wholehearted confidence in his ability to deal with it. But the arrogance of Milton is an old topic of criticism. Let us rather lay stress on his amazing modesty - an excellent virtue, strangely neglected in the less virile poetry of later ages - the modesty of believing that there was such a thing as poetry in the world before he came to invent it, and that even he had something to learn from other authors.

Milton, of course, did not believe that poetry was to be produced by reading alone, nor by mere practice in the art of composition. He was well aware that there existed a race of men,

Deep verst in books and shallow in themselves, and he was not ambitious to be reckoned among them. Quite early in life he formed the opinion that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem." He must "have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."⁽¹⁾ This of course requires some effort. The work which Milton has in mind is "not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite; nor to be obtained by the invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases."⁽²⁾ Other things too were necessary, as Milton explains in his sixth Latin elegy.

(1) An Apology for Smectymnuus. P.W.III,118. (Unless otherwise stated, the references to the Prose Works are to the Bohn Edition).

(2) Reason of Church Government, P.W.II,481.

That a poet should seek to attain to a closer relationship with the presiding spirit of the universe than is enjoyed by most of us is not at all strange. The method adopted by Milton to achieve that end must, however, be regarded as peculiar. Direct prayer, together with a severe moral discipline in everyday life, is a means too crude and primitive to commend itself to later poets; it lacks the true transcendental touch. Similarly Milton's assertion that a divine spirit of inspiration visited his slumbers nightly has been lightly dismissed as altogether too ingenuous. Your true modern poet cares for none of these things. He becomes cognisant of the divine only at rare intervals - in the contemplation, it may be, of a sunset or of an Alpine peak. He finds vestiges of the divine metaphysical power behind this physical world chiefly in those phenomena which come within the domain of physical science. And sometimes he is led to assail the men of science for making things difficult for him.

The one phenomenon, however, which least lends itself to the explanations of science and which, therefore, might be supposed to point most directly to the workings of some preternatural principle, seems to have no divine

suggestion for him. In former days, however, the anomalous position of the human mind in this world of ours was more fully realised. "The spirit of man," said Wisdom of old, "is the lamp of the Lord." "The true Shekinah," said Chrysostom, "is man." Nor did ever any man realise this truth more completely than Milton. Thus, for example, in his seventh Latin Prolusio: "I regard it as known and accepted by all that the great Maker of the Universe, when he had constituted all things else fleeting and corruptible, did mingle up with Man, in addition to that of him which is mortal, a certain divine breath, as it were part of Himself, immortal, indestructible, free from death and extinction." So also in Paradise Lost we find the rest of creation brought about by the Son, "the secondary and instrumental cause," but man was created only at the special suggestion of the Father.⁽³⁾ This passage, together with what follows, is important because it illustrates how strongly Milton felt about the matter.

In the Treatise of Christian Doctrine, it should be noted, Milton is much more cautious. The phrase, "Let us make", is there interpreted, not as a colloquy between the Father and Son. The superiority of man is indicated

(3) VII, 516 ff.

solely by the fact that these words seem to imply a certain deliberation on the part of God before proceeding to man's creation.⁽⁴⁾ It is even stated explicitly that "when God infused the breath of life into man, what man thereby received was not a portion of God's essence, or a participation of the divine nature, but that measure of the divine virtue or influence, which was commensurate to the capabilities of the recipient. For it appears from Psal. civ. 29, 30. that he infused the breath of life into other living beings also:- 'thou takest away their breath, they die ... thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created;' whence we learn that every living thing receives animation from one and the same source of life and breath; inasmuch as when God takes back to himself that spirit or breath of life, they cease to exist. Eccles. iii. 19: 'they have all one breath.'⁽⁵⁾

But whenever his imagination is really aroused, be it in an early Latin oration or later in Paradise Lost itself, Milton finds it impossible to rest satisfied with so uninspiring a doctrine. In Paradise Lost, indeed, the creation of Adam and the breathing of the breath of life seem, at the first reading, to be the work of the Father,

(4) Sumner's translation. P.W. IV, 187.

(5) P.W. IV, 187-88.

not of the Son. It is difficult to see how, according to Milton's notions, the Father could thus bring himself into the work of creation. Perhaps this is Milton's way of suggesting that there is, after all, a certain impossible something in man,

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity which mark him out as being other than a mere constituent element in the world in which he finds himself. To one manifestation of the divinity of human intellect, Milton attached particular importance:

vatis opus divinum ... carmen,
Quo nihil aethereos ortus, & semina caeli,
Nil magis humanam commendat origine mentem, (6)
Sancta Prometheae retinens vestigia flammae.

We can understand therefore why he never wished to be "a dead leaf that thou mightest bear," nor prayed:

Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is,
though he might wish to share the power of

Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old. (7)

(6) Ad Patrem, 17-20.

(7) Though he insists on the difference between his Muse and those of Olympus (P.L. VII, 5 ff.) it is with a sort of regret. Earlier in Paradise Lost he had avoided such a distinction (III, 26 ff.; though I, 6 ff. makes a distinction in degree if not in kind).

* The Bohn edition, following apparently Symonds I, 290, reads
"progeny." "Potency" is the reading of the Amsterdam edition (1698)
p. 424 and of Hales's reprint of the 1644 text.

Hence comes Milton's reverence for great books. In telling the story of his own life, the events on which he lays most stress are not such as are recorded by Wordsworth in The Prelude. The landmarks in his inner history are the authors he read: Plato, for example, or Petrarch and Dante.⁽⁸⁾ "Books," he insists, "are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them."⁽⁹⁾ He can be even more indignant at the slaughter of a book, than another poet might be at the demolition of some brotherhood of noble trees at the hands of a degenerate nobleman. "As good almost kill a man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. It is true, no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps, there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft

(8) Lines added to Elegy VII; Apology &c. P.W.III, 117 & 119.

(9) Areopagitica, P.W.II, 55.

recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse."⁽¹⁾

Thus it is that Milton, after insisting that great poetry can only be achieved by the aid of that eternal Spirit which inspired the greatest of the prophetic bards of Israel, can add, without any feeling of incongruity: "To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs."⁽²⁾

If any should doubt the necessity for so extensive a course of study, let him take heed of all the things required, in Milton's Education tractate, before one is even competent to learn what the laws are of a true epic poem. If so much is necessary merely as preliminary training in appreciation, how much more will be required from him who aspires to write such a poem. The author of The Reason of Church Government had, to all appearances, made some fair progress in his reading. Yet, by his own confession, his course had not then fairly begun. But although he refuses to consider himself a poet until "the full circle⁽³⁾ of my private studies" is completed, he is confident in his promises of the future: "till which in some measure

(1) ibid.

(2) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 481.

(3) ibid. II, 476.

be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them."⁽⁴⁾ This was in 1641. What the pledges in question were may be judged from the little volume published four years later. Probably never has any author published a first volume comparable with it. On the title-page was a motto, evidently of Milton's own choosing:

Baccare frontem
Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro.

Milton, it has been said with truth, is his own best critic. Therefore, if we would read his works aright, we must try to gain something approaching his own point of view; we must understand his purpose and try to appreciate those things to which he himself attached importance. This must be our endeavour. In the foregoing remarks we have briefly, and perhaps over-emphatically, indicated something of the essentials of the Miltonic point of view. Where Milton's attitude differs from that of other poets, we have not sought to co-ordinate the two on more general grounds. We have not even considered that Milton himself might be in the wrong of it. We have

(4) ibid. II, 481.

shown abundantly in passing that the Miltonic conception might be most unprofitably applied in the consideration of other poets.

This however is true of the mental attitudes of many great artists. Men of great creative genius are not generally inspired by a placid academic aesthetic which can find infinite virtues in opposing schools, rendering to each and all faint praise tempered accurately to their several deservings. Nevertheless, it is still our first duty to try to understand these men and their works from their own individual, albeit eccentric, points of view. Afterwards, of course, if we are perfectly sure of our own greater breadth of understanding in these matters, we can refer these works to our own more absolute and universal standards. Such high matters as these, however, are beyond our present purpose. Before proceeding with our humbler task, let us summarise some considerations which present themselves for our guidance.

In the first place, we must remember that the existence of a great poem depends upon the existence of a great poet. Not even an epic poem can be constructed by the impersonal agency of the Rules, though they be never so well supplied with material in the form of Fable,

Characters, Sentiments, Probable and Marvellous and what not. Yet we must avoid the temptations of biography. The life lived "Samii pro more magistri" is not that best fitted for such treatment. Such pieces as the sonnet to Lawrence may suggest that Milton lived not always in this Samian fashion; but the mood in which that sonnet was written does not carry us far towards the understanding of Paradise Lost.

Secondly, we must bear in mind that the reading of books occupied a great deal of Milton's time on earth. They supplied him with data and ideas. Consequently we must endeavour to allow fully for their influence in the formation of his poetic character. To do this does not mean that we must deliver ourselves bound hand and foot to the "ledger school of criticism" that "with curious finger and thumb picks holes in the mosaic," and is always ready to cry "Thief!" when a borrowing is detected.⁽⁵⁾ It need imply no more than a simple recognition that authors write in order to be read. (And what boots the reading, if all is to be forthwith discarded and forgotten?) Neither need we proclaim our allegiance to the band of "ferrets and

(5) Cf. Raleigh: Milton, pp.171-72.

mousehunts of an index" which, from time to time, presents to us the unique and unassailable source from which the whole conception of Paradise Lost was taken. Rather we shall be disposed to view all such claims with suspicion. We shall see that Milton, long choosing and beginning late, was in a very different position from an Elizabethan dramatist, who had a regular market to supply. Shakespeare, in his search for plots at short notice, may well have seized eagerly on any fresh Italian toy he might find on the bookstalls of Paul's, and have acquired the habit of making great literature out of unpromising material. It requires an effort to imagine Milton devoting similar pains to the elaboration of a theme taken from a stray low-Dutch drama. He never needed to seek for material in this way. His supply of literature was always in excess of the demand which he made upon it.

Finally, by temperance taught, let us observe "the rule of not-too-much". Let us not lay too much stress on our "House" and "Shop" antithesis. God Almighty rested the seventh day, and even his servant Milton had moments of relaxation. In his Horton days he had other means of knowing violets and nightingales than by the aid of Sophocles. His Italian sonnets and

the story of his first marriage are indications that his knowledge of women was not derived entirely from Euripides nor from the Bible. His interest in the affairs of his time gave him a closer knowledge of the actuality of debate than he would have gained by the sole perusal of Cicero's or Demosthenes' orations.⁽⁶⁾ These things have left their mark on Paradise Lost; the preparation for the great work was still going on even when Milton knew it not. Our main purpose is to emphasise the conscious preparation, which has usually received but inadequate attention. We cannot afford, however, entirely to ignore the subconscious process.

(6) The reference in P.L. IX, 671-72 suggests that Milton had no great respect for post-classical debate. But he had once used a different language, e.g. of Vane:
Then whome a better Senatour nere held
The helme of Rome, when gownes not armes repelld
The feirce Epeirot & the African bold.
That he had followed with attention some of the deliberations of his time is stated in the dedication of his treatises of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes (ed. Symmons III, 318).

P A R T I.

THE PRELUDE.

Je me figure un auteur
Qui dit: Je chanterai la guerre
Que firent les Titans au maître du tonnerre.
C'est promettre beaucoup:

La Fontaine: La montagne qui accouche.

CHAPTER I.

HOME AND SCHOOL.

the childhood shews the man,
As morning shews the day. Paradise Regained.

1.

"The xxth. daye of December, 1608," we are informed by the register of Allhallows, Bread Street, "was baptized John, the sonne of John Mylton, scrivener."

Biographers are wont to remind us that in the year 1608 Shakespeare had just produced Antony and Cleopatra and that Ben Jonson, Webster and Beaumont and Fletcher were thriving. To this they add that the house of John Milton, scrivener, at the sign of the Spread Eagle was but a stone's throw from the Mermaid, the great meeting-place of the illustrious Elizabethans. The inference is obvious, but misleading. Milton too, it is said, was, or ought to have been, an Elizabethan. It may be well therefore, at the outset, to insist that at the time of Milton's

birth Elizabeth had been dead five years. The great writers of the time did not, of course, cease writing immediately upon hearing of the queen's demise. Even the imperious Gloriana would hardly wish to test the oft-professed devotion of her poetical subjects by ordering at her funeral a general suttee of men of letters. So the Elizabethan literature in the persons of the Elizabethan poets still lived on. The Elizabethan age nevertheless had passed away. The years in which Milton grew to manhood were not those in which the genius of the great Elizabethans was formed. These were not the days of Marlowe and of Greene but the years between the time of Burton and that of Sir Thomas Browne, a time when translunary bravura and silly sooth had made way for the scholarly labours of Ben Jonson. These were not the Armada years. The best-known seaman of this age was employed, not in circumnavigating the globe, but in writing universal history in the Tower. The aspiration of Raleigh, no doubt, was similar to that which inspired Drake, but it now had to seek a fresh field of action. When Raleigh did attempt a venture after the earlier fashion in the Spanish dominions in America, the changed conditions of the time were brought home to him with unpleasant directness. The

Elizabethan age with its lust of life and all its varied activities was no more. In its stead came an age of scholarship.

It is well-known that the essence of scholarship is controversy and the spirited defence of opposing opinions. This has been recognised ever since mediaeval times. Even in these emasculate latter days when its chief concern is often with quite harmless and unimportant topics, scholarly pugnacity is a thing to be admired. In the time of Milton its chief interest was in theological questions - questions, that is, of vital importance which had to be answered correctly if one's immortal soul was to be saved alive. The disputants moreover were not men such as men now are, but warriors of heroic mould. Their boundless erudition in no wise signified a loss of the old Elizabethan energy; it indicated rather a re-direction of that energy into new channels. It is not surprising therefore that religious controversy should have become a thing of the greatest importance.

In those days too, it must be remembered, the scholarly prize-ring was no close preserve. The public took the greatest interest in these encounters, and thus the erudite gladiators had the best of all incentives to

the true fighting man - a great and responsive audience. Interest in questions of religion was common to all ranks of society. Never, indeed, were these questions debated so universally and with such acrimony and learning. If we bear this in mind, we shall avoid the vulgar error of regarding Milton as an Elizabethan who, by reason of his almost unaccountable pedantry and his absolutely unparalleled obsession for religious discussion, sacrificed his native birthright of free and untrammelled songster-ship. We may then see him more truly as the greatest representative of an essentially scholarly age in which religious questions were all-important.

2.

John Milton, scrivener, father of the poet, is reported to have been an Oxford graduate. He was evidently a good man of business. Also he held definite views on matters of religion, inasmuch as he had been disinherited by his father for professing the protestant faith. His opinions were puritanical, but he was not a Separatist. No doubt he was saved from some of the less gracious characteristics of Puritanism by his love of music, in

which art he enjoyed some degree of contemporary eminence. His greatest achievement, however, was in the more difficult art of being father to a man of genius. In this, not even the father of Horace has more fully deserved the grateful regard of posterity. His only rival in English literature appears to be the elder Ruskin, with whom he has been aptly compared. Like him, he devoted extraordinary pains to his son's education and helped to foster in him a love of the arts, encouraging the young Milton to the study of music as Ruskin was similarly encouraged to study painting. Like him too, he hoped some day to see his son occupy an important position in the church.

This fact should teach us not to lay too much stress on the artistic influence of either of these estimable parents. Both were primarily men of business. They regarded a knowledge of the arts as a harmless, even, it may be, as an elegant and essential accomplishment, but it is not likely that either of them seriously entertained the belief afterwards held by their sons, that art itself is the noblest of human vocations, and that the office of singing may be quite as sacred as the office of speaking,
(1)
even in churches. If they paid attention to the

(1) Cf. Reason of Church Government, P.W.II, 479. "These abilities ... are of power beside the office of a pulpit etc." and 480. "Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits etc."

education of their sons, they did so because they wished them to enter a sound and dignified profession - a profession which had some real standing and whose quality could be well appreciated by the sensible social instincts of a scrivener or a wine merchant. There can be no doubt that the elder Milton felt some disappointment when the poet announced that he could not enter the Church. But though he can hardly have been in complete sympathy with his son's later aspirations, his faith in him seems never to have wavered. It was by reason of his father's generosity that Milton was able to enjoy, at Horton, that period of studious leisure which bore such wonderful fruit in the years to come.

Of Milton's mother we know very little. Milton himself only mentions her probity and kindness of heart, and tells us that it was not until after her death that he left home. The nature of her influence on her son's development is therefore a matter of conjecture. Milton, we know, was extremely susceptible to feminine influence. Also it is to be noted that, in the works written after his mother's death, he becomes increasingly and, to some readers, offensively masculine. Can we assume that the gentler manner of the Horton years was in any measure due to his

unconsciously conforming to maternal ideals? Stay-at-home youths are popularly supposed to be very responsive to such influence. Again, Milton dared to profess aims and ambitions, idealistic and remote, not altogether consonant with the wishes of his father; and he was allowed to stay at home to carry them out. One is tempted to attribute this to the kind offices of a devoted mother. At least we may confidently assert that most mothers can do more in this way than any number of Latin verses "Ad Patrem".

3.

Milton himself regarded his career as beginning with his schooldays at St. Paul's. Before he could be admitted, however, he had to be able "to rede and write latin, and englisshe sufficiently, so that he be able to rede and write his owne lessons." Obviously, therefore, he had already received some instruction. His first teacher, says Aubrey, was "a puritan in Essex who cutt his haire short." This puritan is of no interest to us unless we identify him with Thomas Young, who almost certainly did teach Milton before he went to St. Paul's. It is more important to note that this connection with Young was kept

up for many years afterwards, probably up to the time of the divorce pamphlets. In those days Young was a member of the Westminster Assembly and, for a time, a person of some little importance in the land. Maybe it was Young's influence that drew Milton into ecclesiastical controversy. Almost certainly it was Milton's regard for his old mentor that caused his intervention in the Smectymnuus dispute. If any credence whatever can be attached to Milton's own professions of regard and personal obligation, we must recognise in Young one of the most potent influences on the early part of Milton's career.

The date of Milton's admission to St. Paul's is not certain, but is generally supposed to have been about 1620. An earlier date has been suggested, ⁽²⁾ but the question is not very important. Milton himself places the commencement of his serious studies in his twelfth year, but whether his earlier and misspent youth had been passed at St. Paul's or elsewhere he did not think fit to record, nor are we concerned to know. The essential fact is that from the year 1620 Milton's schooling counts as a part of his literary biography.

The High Master in Milton's day was Alexander Gill

(2) By A. F. Leach: Milton as Schoolboy etc. in Proceedings of the British Academy, 1907-08.

the elder. He is chiefly remembered as the author of
Logonomia Anglica, published in 1619.⁽³⁾ In this work
he advocates a reformed method of spelling and gives
incidentally his own views on English pronunciation.
These views were somewhat old-fashioned, and it is some-
times found that a schoolmaster with old-fashioned ideas
of pronunciation - especially one who thinks his ideas
worthy of publication - is rather precise in his own
speech and tends to demand a similar niceness in his
pupils. Such a one will use all the means he can to
prevent their adopting modern barbarisms. Accordingly
it may be due in part to Gill's training that Milton's
English should be so much more nearly akin to that of
Shakespeare than to the English of men like Dryden, with
whom he was more nearly contemporary.

The latter part of Gill's treatise is concerned
with Etymology, Syntax and Prosody. Syntax includes such
rhetorical matters as tropes and figures of speech and is
illustrated by numerous examples, many of them from Spenser.
It is not certain that he instructed his scholars in these
things, but his most distinguished pupil, at all events, was
always wont to consider Latin and English composition alike

(3) See H. C. Wyld: Historical Study of the Mother
Tongue, p.303.

(4)
as matters of scholarship. Milton never regarded the writing of English as an enterprise to be lightly undertaken without other aid than the light of nature, as a man might do whose training in composition had been confined to the classical languages.

A more direct influence was that exercised by Alexander Gill the younger, who from the year 1621 onwards acted as under-usher to his father. Milton, we know, had by this time commenced to take his studies seriously, and Gill's arrival at the school must have made a great impression on him. For Gill had not long come down from the larger world of the university, to which Milton's own future pointed. He was young, brimful of ideas, and strong in his own opinions. At Oxford he had acquired a great reputation as a Latin and Greek versifier, nor had he yet been teaching long enough (5) to have lost all his original brightness. The fact that Gill himself was an Old Pauline may have specially commended him to his scholars. In Milton's case, too, there was a further link between master and pupil in the person of Charles Diodati, who during the greater part of their school

(4) Cf. letter to Gill, 4 December, 1634.

(5) Leach suggests that he had perhaps assisted Farnaby for two years.

connection was in residence at Gill's own university of Oxford.

The closeness of this relationship is attested by the letters written by Milton after leaving school, in which he professes the utmost admiration for Gill's learning and skill in versification. To Gill's judgement also Milton submitted some of his own verses, knowing him to be a severe critic. Nor could Milton's association, at this impressionable age, with a person of Gill's temperament fail to influence him. A man with strong protestant leanings, Gill was decidedly outspoken in the expression of his opinions. If Milton had learned to look upon him as a model of the kind of behaviour which it behoved a young man to adopt on quitting school for the less restricted confines of the university, certain events in his own undergraduate career might be easily explained. But the real importance of this connection with Gill the younger is not to be found at the beginning but rather towards the end of Milton's undergraduateship, when it probably exercised a decisive influence on his choice of a career.

4.

We have unfortunately no direct information

concerning the curriculum of St. Paul's in Milton's time, but we are assured that the scholars in the top forms were commonly "made perfect grammarians, good orators and poets, and well instructed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and sometimes in other Oriental tongues." In Latin the usual school authors of the time seem to have been Terence, Cicero, Caesar, Virgil, Ovid, Sallust and Mantuan. The Greek authors are more uncertain. At Eton nothing higher is named than the Greek grammar, and even in those schools where special authors were specified, there was surprisingly little uniformity. It was quite possible for Milton to have read at school such unlikely authors as Musaeus, Heliodorus or Quintus Calaber; on the other hand, it is by no means certain that he learned anything of the Attic tragedians.⁽⁶⁾ Some Greek, however, he certainly did learn. At St. Paul's, the first school to be associated with the new learning, Greek was not likely to be neglected.

The pious founder of the school, however, had not wished his pupils to be educated solely by the reading of pagan authors. He had indeed suggested certain "Cristyn auctors that wrote theyre wysdome with clene and chaste laten in verse or prose," such as Lactantius, Prudentius,

(6) Cf. Sir J. E. Sandys in Shakespeare's England, vol.I, p.237.

Sedulius and Mantuan. Masson decides, somewhat hastily, that by this time the scholars of St. Paul's had long ceased from "peddling over Sedulius and other small practitioners of later or middle-aged Latinity," but there is reason to suppose that some, at least, of these authors were still read.⁽⁷⁾ There would be nothing unusual in reading Mantuan as a school author,⁽⁸⁾ and a good case has been made out for Prudentius.⁽⁹⁾ That Milton was acquainted with Lactantius must be admitted, although the citations in the Commonplace Book forbid us to attribute any parallelisms of phrase in Paradise Lost to reminiscences of school reading.⁽¹⁾ There is nothing to show Milton's acquaintance with Sedulius,⁽²⁾ Proba or Juvenous. The question, however, is of little importance, since we may be sure that Colet's "Cristyn auctors", if

(7) Cf. Leach ut supra.

(8) W.P. Mustard (The Eclogues of Baptista Mantuanus, Baltimore, 1911, p.37) suggests that Colet had not the Eclogues in mind. A.S. Cook's parallels (Modern Lang. Review, Jan.1907) are not from the Eclogues, though Mustard gives some on p.52.

(9) By Leach.

(1) As is done by Leach. For reminiscences of Lactantius see also Osgood in Modern Lang. Notes XVI, 1901, p.141.

(2) Despite the assertions of Sigerson: The Easter Song ... of Sedulius etc., Dublin, 1922, pp.147 ff.

read at all, were not read to the exclusion of classical writers. Milton almost certainly read Ovid, Virgil and Homer at school, and that is all that matters. Colet's authors would be likely to teach him only one thing of importance: that Christianity had already waited long enough for a poet capable of competing with Homer and Virgil.

The teaching of Hebrew in schools was a consequence of the predominantly theological purpose of contemporary scholarship, and was by no means unusual. Hoole's curriculum allowed for the teaching of Hebrew on three days a week in the sixth form, and Lancelot Andrewes, when Dean of the Abbey, had read Hebrew with senior boys of Westminster School. That Milton had acquired some Hebrew at school is shown by a letter to Young, written a few weeks after his admission to Christ's College, acknowledging the gift of a Hebrew Bible which he had already received.

Instruction in English was no essential part of seventeenth century education. Yet Mulcaster had already insisted on its importance as did Brinsley afterwards. Pedagogic opinion being therefore not entirely opposed to such practices, it is by no means unlikely that

the elder Gill contrived to introduce some instruction in the mother tongue into the school curriculum. It was to Gill probably that Milton owed his first introduction to Spenser. His early knowledge of Sylvester's Du Bartas, on the other hand, may be due to home influences. The playwrights would probably not be encouraged at home, nor, if Bodley's may be taken as representative of scholarly opinion, by Gill senior; his son, however, may have been more attracted by them. Probably from neither of the Gills did Milton learn to admire Jonson's learned sock. But whatever the instruction he received, Milton's own first attempts in English verse date from his schooldays. Of the two Psalms then translated, Psalm CXIV was again used by him as an exercise in Greek verse and sent to Gill; which suggests that perhaps the versification of Psalms had been a familiar exercise at St. Paul's.

In Milton's own scheme of education drawn up in later years, Latin, Greek and Hebrew were each to have set hours allotted to them. Italian was to be picked up at odd moments. French was not mentioned, but, if learned at all, was doubtless to be acquired in the same way. This probably represents Milton's own experience. Ad Patrem suggests that he learned French and Italian about the same

time as Hebrew. His knowledge of French, however, never led to any important results. Nor indeed does his study of Italian begin to bear fruit for several years to come.

5.

Milton's devotion to his studies was exemplary,⁽³⁾
as he himself records:

"My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight."⁽⁴⁾

But Milton's whole-hearted devotion to his work caused him not to notice, or not to mention, one detail - for which we have to thank Aubrey - that his literary pursuits had already begun to cause some inconvenience to the female part of the household. His father, it seems, ordered the maid to sit up for him. In the letter to Young already referred to, he apologises for his composition since he is not as usual
⁽⁵⁾
surrounded by books.

(3) "Magnum ac salubre sufficiens exemplum deflexi nostri saeculi adolescentibus." Des Essarts: De Veterum Poetarum ... apud Miltonem Imitatione, Paris, 1871, p.5.

(4) Second Defence (trans.) P.W.I, 254.

(5) "Non libris, ut soleo, circumseptus," ed. Symmons VI, 110. Cf. Elegy I, "mea vita libri."

There are reasons for supposing that serious study was not uncommon among seventeenth century school-boys. Games had not yet acquired their present importance, and there was consequently less opportunity of distinguishing one's self outside of one's school work. In the actual work of the school, moreover, there were yet none of those subjects which aim at an equal development of faculty without the sheer drudgery which scholarship demands. But even allowing for all this, we cannot but regard Milton as an exceptional pupil. A well-known passage in Paradise Regained,⁽⁶⁾ without being of necessity autobiographical, shows at least that the idea of childish play was not altogether foreign to seventeenth century notions. The long school hours which were then customary would, one might suppose, be sufficient even for studious scholars, without additional midnight studies. Milton's continued friendship with his former master, the younger Gill, marks him out as a specially studious person, and the care of his father in providing additional tutors points in the same direction.

On the other hand, there is nothing to show that he was ever regarded by his schoolfellows as peculiar. We

(6) I, 201 ff.

hear, for example, none of those complaints of harsh treatment which are the inevitable consequence of peculiarity in schoolboys. Such murmurings, however, had not become fashionable: the humanism of the Renaissance was not prone to cocker the sub-normal. Milton, be it noted, was ever fond of asserting his own physical fitness,⁽⁷⁾ yet, in speaking of his early studies, he lays no claim to an understanding beyond his years.⁽⁸⁾ Certainly not until after the time of the Italian journey can he be regarded as a star that dwelt apart. The fact that he wrote Arcades and Comus and that he was invited to contribute to the volume in memory of King should prevent us from regarding him as one who lived apart from his kind.

One of the most pleasing features in Milton's early life is his friendship with Diodati. For Diodati⁽⁹⁾ seems to have been a youth of much vivacity and wit, a person not at all likely to tolerate a prig. Yet this same Diodati was the only person to whom Milton really opened his heart, a circumstance which in itself argues something of human in Milton's constitution. And the

(7) e.g. Second Defence, P.W. I, 235.

(8) "But as my age then was, so I understood them." Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 116.

(9) Cf. Epitaphium Damonis, 55-56.

picture afforded by the earliest of these revelations⁽¹⁾
is that of a very human Milton indeed. Later, it is
true, Milton assumes a more serious tone,⁽²⁾ but even
then his regard for Diodati is such that he cannot look
with unsympathetic eyes upon his friend's innocent amuse-
ments. It is certain that, after he left school, Milton
never formed any other such friendship as that of Diodati.
His seriousness and self-sufficiency were soon remarked at
Cambridge and seem to have kept him from forming any
intimate associations there. Diodati's untimely death,
therefore, cannot be too much regretted.

6.

From his schooldays must be dated Milton's
earliest verses. Two pieces then composed, the versions
of Psalms CXIV and CXXXVI, he himself thought fit to
preserve. They have no great merit, nor do we expect
it. We are not told whether they were school exercises
or spontaneous effusions. Psalm CXIV is in decasyllabic
couplets and is expressly entitled A Paraphrase on Psalm
114. It has every appearance of being a definite school

(1) Elegy I.

(2) Elegy VI.

task. The other, however, is not a copy of verses on a set theme, but rather a metrical psalm of the kind which Puritans delighted in and for which the elder Milton composed tunes. This piece, indeed, has usually been preferred to the former one, and it is true that Psalm CXIV contains nothing so good as:

That by his all-commanding might,
Did fill the new-made world with light.

But anyone who has tried to instruct boys in verse-writing knows that, whereas octosyllables present little difficulty, decasyllabic lines are usually found much harder. Milton certainly does not handle them very successfully - and that is why one would like to know whether he had received any instruction in the matter - but in his last two lines he limps less lamely than before and tries to make his verses do something:

That glassy flouds from rugged rocks can crush,
And make soft rills from fiery flint-stones gush.

It savours somewhat of ragged rascals and rural races, or of Bully Bottom's part to tear a cat in, but there is something praiseworthy in the intention.

We need not take these verses seriously. Milton was not yet a poet, and, so far as we know, he had no thought of being a poet. His aim was to become a minister.

CHAPTER II.

CAMBRIDGE.

By whose directions undeceivable,
Leaving our schoolmen's vulgar trodden paths,
And following the ancient reverend steps
Of Trismegistus and Pythagoras,
Through uncouth ways and unaccessible,
Dost pass into the spacious pleasant fields
Of divine science and philosophy.

Peele: The Honour of the Garter.

1.

Milton was admitted at Christ's as a lesser pensioner February 12, 1624-5, and probably began residence at the beginning of the following term. Both the Gills were Oxford men, and so possibly was Milton's father. Moreover his bosom friend, Diodati, was even now at Oxford. We may wonder then why Milton was sent to Cambridge. Pattison conjectures that perhaps his father feared the growing Arminianism or High Church tendency of his own university.

The Milton who went up to Cambridge was a model pupil who had gained the approval and the continued friendship of two at least of his teachers. Obviously he was a

scholar who could be instructed. It is not likely that his mental disposition was altered immediately on his entrance to the university. Milton was no "university tulip"; his object in going to Cambridge was strictly professional. What he sought was not general culture and self-development but the training necessary for a definite calling. To Milton's contemporaries Oxford and Cambridge were places where they made ministers, and when Milton himself afterwards came to express his disapproval of the university system his attack was based on this assumption.⁽¹⁾ At the outset, therefore, the young scholar doubtless believed that his sole business was to follow the course of instruction provided for him and that by so doing he would become fully qualified for the ministry.

The poems of 1626, after a year's residence at Cambridge, still bespeak this strictly professional interest in Church and University matters. The death of Bacon, for example, is left unnoticed, but Milton is careful to celebrate, in Latin verse, the deaths of two university officers and of Bishops Andrewes and Felton. The elegy on Lancelot Andrewes is particularly noteworthy since Milton was afterwards to write

(1) Letter to Gill, July 2, 1628. Cf. Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings, P.W.III, 36.

of this worthy prelate in quite another strain. It is evident from these poems that Milton's ambitions and interests are as yet confined within the ordinary academic and clerical sphere. All the poems of this time save one are in Latin, and that one is addressed to a lady who probably knew no Latin. This suggests a scholarly rather than a poetic stimulus. Even the English poem is tamely imitative to a degree unparalleled in any of Milton's later works. The only poem which shows any considerable imaginative effort is the Latin In Quintum Novembris; and even here the source of inspiration is religious controversy - that aspect of religion least proper for a poet, however necessary it may be for the professional student.

It is probably to this early part of Milton's university career that the second of his Latin Prolusiones belongs.⁽²⁾ Both the opening and the conclusion of this speech show an admirable modesty in the young scholar. Yet he is most enthusiastic in his espousal of a theme which was evidently dear to him, and to which he recurs in his poems. Music had been an essential factor in Milton's early training, and to one so susceptible to its influence it had come to

(2) Masson thinks it may be the earliest of them all.

mean something more than a mere solace or amusement. There was, to Milton, something so inexpressibly, yet so profoundly, satisfying in musical harmony, that he could not but regard it as somehow typifying the supreme harmony of the universe. There must be something fine and beautiful in the ultimate scheme of things: the consonance of the creation must be not merely scientific and mathematical but musical also. He cannot conceive the universe as a mechanical treadmill. Thus he supports warmly the idealism of Pythagoras - that god of philosophers - and of Plato against their wretched calumniator Aristotle. He will not have the spheres deprived of their presiding deities.

The ingenuous manner in which he wonders whether Pythagoras were by chance some good genius, native of heaven, sent hither to inspire us with heavenly lore is only a further exaggeration of the reverential regard which Milton at this time paid to his teachers. This reverence, no doubt, caused him to rate too highly the desire for virtue inherent in human nature. The naïveté of his closing appeal is particularly noteworthy:

"If we carried pure and snow-clean hearts, as did Pythagoras of old, then should our ears resound and be filled with the sweet music of the over-wheeling stars, and all things should, on the instant, return as to the golden age, and, thus, free at last from misery, we should lead a life of easy blessedness,

enviable even by the gods."⁽³⁾

If Milton imagined that by assiduous devotion to the university curriculum he was to be helped to the realisation of an ambition conceived in these lofty terms, he evidently did not know Cambridge. Wiser and more tolerant seniors would perhaps recommend him to temper somewhat his idealistic enthusiasm and suggest that, as he grew older, he might modify his views regarding the more pedestrian Aristotle. His fellow-undergraduates would regard him as an impossible innocent - the "Lady of Christ's." Milton resented the implication and in his later addresses adopted a tone which was considerably less ladylike.

2.

The outstanding incident of Milton's university life was the temporary rustication during which he wrote the first Latin elegy to Diodati. Of the circumstances thereof nothing positively is known. The public flogging and the rest of it dates from the time of Johnson, and what Johnson says is not evidence. Nor indeed is it fair and

(3) Masson's translation.

honest conjecture. The sneaking way in which the accusation is insinuated under a show of mock-reluctance can deceive none but the most stupid. "I am ashamed," says Johnson, "to relate what I fear is true, that Milton was one of the last students in either university that suffered the public indignity of corporal correction."⁽⁴⁾ If this had been a well-established tradition, recorded by all previous biographers and therefore impossible of omission, we might accept Johnson's words as being written in all sincerity. No previous biographer, however, makes this statement, nor can any evidence be found for it. Clearly then there was no pressing need for Johnson to make an assertion which cost him so much pain.

Yet Elegy I shows that Milton did have some trouble with the authorities and that he was sent down for a period. None of his contemporaries seem to have known anything definite about the matter, although apparently a confused echo reached the ears of the Remon-

(4) Note the phrase, "the public indignity of corporal correction." Warton, no doubt, may be taken as endeavouring to mean something of the sort. But, in the note on Elegy I at least, he does not state that Milton's punishment was public, and he goes to some trouble to show that it was no great indignity. Moreover, though he talks of whipping in general as a punishment, there is nothing in his remarks to show that Milton's whipping was indeed a correction and not a provocation. His reference to Dr. Potter suggests that some tutors were distinctly free with their whippings.

strant and misled him into accusing Milton of having been expelled from the university. All that Aubrey learned from Milton's brother was, it seems, that he had been badly treated by his tutor Chappell and that the college authorities had followed the exceptional course of permitting him to change his tutor. The "unkindness" of Chappell probably explains the allusion in the lines:

Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri
Caeteraque ingenio non subeunda meo,

and the special treatment which the powers had been constrained to accord him may account for the tone of Milton's references to Cambridge. He writes not humbly as one who is grateful for a kindness received. He affects lordly unconcern. Apparently he himself is making the concession in suffering himself to return. He is quite comfortable where he is; his exile causes him no concern; he feels no yearning for the habitation from which he has been so ceremoniously excluded and he has certainly not busied himself to secure his return. It is with regret that he takes leave of his present happiness, but it is decided that he is to go back to the wrangling of the schools.

When and whence Aubrey derived his later information we have no means of knowing, but we may note that the phrase "he whipt him" is inserted as a gloss on

the word "unkindness". The whipping therefore - taking this evidence for what it is worth - was the cause of the trouble not the outcome thereof. Apparently Chappell had behaved foolishly and given his pupil just cause of complaint, probably by striking him. To save Chappell's face the unusual course of a change of tutors was adopted. If this was indeed contrary to the rules, it was a humiliating step to take, but it is a ticklish business to cast out privily and uncondemned one that is a Roman. That is all that we can gather from contemporary evidence. The legend related by Johnson goes back no further than his own age. A discursive accumulator of knowledge like Warton could not be expected to seek the truth by the mere examination of the only evidence available. He must adduce his instances. The charge of having been publicly flogged at the universities was, it would appear, a favourite accusation against Puritans in post-Restoration days, and Warton finds two instances: Henry Stubbe and Hugh Peters. It does not occur to him that the author of Regicides no Saints nor Martyrs would hardly have singled out Hugh Peters if the notorious writer of Eikonoklastes, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates and the two Defences had been subjected to the same indignity. For Warton these instances served only to prove this particular characteristic of the genus Puritan.

By such evidence as this the massive common-sense of Johnson was reluctantly constrained to accept a fact which he was ashamed to record.

3.

The cause of the trouble is unknown. There is no reason to suppose that it was occasioned by Milton's resistance to college discipline. The other fellows of the college, we may be sure, would look askance at a student who had quarrelled with one of their number, if that student had been an obstinate or rebellious person, no matter how brilliant his other parts besides. How then should we account for the "more than ordinary favour and respect" which Milton received at their hands?⁽⁵⁾ Again, "the Lady" is not exactly the nickname one would apply to a rebel. And we must note that, after this incident, Milton seems to have gained popularity with the undergraduates as well as with the fellows. This alone would discredit the flogging legend. "The Lady" would never have survived such an indignity. One may surmise that the only way in which "she" could rise suddenly from

(5) Apology for Smectymnus, P.W. III, 111.

being an object of derision into a blaze of popularity would be by gaining a decisive victory over the common enemy.

Masson would assign the incident to the year 1626, for no better reason, apparently, than that Milton could not have been lawfully and officially whipped if he had been more than eighteen years of age. Since, however, the whipping was probably quite out of order, it might have been this very circumstance which proved Chappell's undoing. Knowing him as a junior student, he perhaps failed to realise that Milton - whose "semblance" was deceptive⁽⁶⁾ - was older than some of his contemporaries. Keightley infers from the tone of the elegy that Milton "had been two or three years at the University, so that he was quite beyond the whipping age."⁽⁷⁾ Mark Pattison definitely places the affair in the year 1627, but gives no reasons. On the whole, however, this date seems preferable to Masson's.

If the incident had occurred before the four Latin commemorative poems of 1626 were written, these poems would look like a pitiful attempt on Milton's part to make his peace with the offended powers. He had written nothing

(6) Cf. Sonnet VII.

(7) Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton, 1855, p.119.

like them before, nor did he continue to write them afterwards. But from what we know of him it seems more likely that such an event would affect him in precisely the opposite direction. We shall probably not be far wrong, therefore, in supposing that the dispute with Chappell came in the term following the composition of these poems, that is the Lent term of 1627. After the Michaelmas term of 1626, at all events, Milton wrote no more poems on university officers nor on bishops. And although, owing to fundamental differences in religion, disputes between tutor and pupil were likely to break out at any time, it may be noticed that the Lent term of 1627 was a favourable time for such an eruption. In the March of that year (8) Laud was incorporated at Cambridge. A chance reference in conversation to such an event would be enough to cause trouble.

4.

One would like more precise data to work upon, since, as has been already suggested, the fixing of this

(8) Masson, Life etc. I, 151. In the following pages Masson relates an incident which he would have been tempted to connect with Milton's rustication, had it occurred in the previous year. Apparently, in the Lent term of 1627, Bainbrigge and Mede were anxiously looking for someone to throw out.

date is of some importance in tracing the history of Milton's mental development. His views, we know, underwent a severe change while he was at Cambridge, and it is worth all our efforts to try to discover the experiences which brought about that change. The affair with Chappell was obviously one that touched his dignity. Such things, whenever they happen in the life of Milton, are fraught with deepest consequence.

Let us accept provisionally the date, 1627, and then examine the records of Milton's thoughts before and after that time. We shall find that the difference is distinctly marked, and that the reasons for accepting that date are thereby greatly strengthened. The first elegy must now, of course, be taken from the poems of 1626, where it is placed by Masson, and considered with those of the following year. Consequently the only poems written before 1627 will be: the imitative On The Death of a Fair Infant in English, the four Latin poems on the deaths of Bishops Andrewes and Felton, of Ridding and of Gostlin, and the In Quintum Novembris. There is not one expression of personal feeling in them all. On the other hand, there is great variety in the choice of metres. Of the five Latin poems, two are in elegiacs, one in alcaics, one in the

measure of Horace's first Epodes, and one is an experiment in hexameters. Milton, so far, is not a poet but a skilled versifier. He is more concerned to exhibit his metrical dexterity than to look in his heart and write.

Then, in 1627, we have the first elegy followed
(9)
immediately by the fourth and seventh. It is noteworthy

(9) Mr. Harris Fletcher in the Times Literary Supplement, January 21, 1926, attacks the accepted date of this elegy, which he would identify with the verses mentioned at the beginning of Milton's prose letter of March 26, 1625. This contention seems open to objection.

(1) The style of the elegy is not what we should expect in the poem alluded to in the prose epistle. Milton's feelings require a fuller and freer form of expression than he could give them in verse. But the expressions of regard in Elegy IV are fuller and more confident than those in the epistle. Far from helping out the elegy, such a letter would be but a weaker echo of its sentiments.

(2) The verses mentioned in the epistle were probably composed (if at all) in the same circumstances as the epistle itself: "non libris, ut soleo, circumseptus." In view of the close resemblance to Tristia III, vii and Ex Ponto IV, v, it seems unlikely that Elegy IV could be so composed. The second or third elegies with their scattered reminiscences might have been. If, on the other hand, the verses were composed in more favourable circumstances than the epistle, there was no occasion for the epistle.

(3) In spite of Mr. Fletcher, the lines (33-38) quoted by him do not "contain a reference to the same period of elapsed time as the epistle"; the epistle says plusquam triennio, whereas the elegy indicates a period of something over two years. How great is the discrepancy between these statements must be a matter of conjecture, but it is a matter of some importance. In the elegy the Sun has seen the Ram for the third time, but only two

Note (9) continued from p.57.

Springs have elapsed and the third Autumn has not yet arrived. To stretch this period to the utmost we must assume that the Sun has completed his third course in the Ram, and this gives us a date in April as the very earliest possibility for a poem which must have been written by March 26. If, on the other hand, we take it that the Sun has only just entered the Ram, we shall be a full year out in our reckonings.

We cannot place the elegy more than three years before the epistle, but there seems to be no difficulty in placing it (as Milton does) two years afterwards, particularly as this period begins in the Ram (March 26) and from the general tone of the elegy finishes somewhere near there. Professor Grierson's suggestion (T.L.S., Feb.11, 1926) that the letter itself may possibly be ante-dated raises further complications, and would cause both letter and elegy to be placed later, if my contention is sound. So that for my purposes this possibility need not be discussed.

The case of Elegy I is not parallel:

(1) It is not dated by Milton.

(2) I cannot help thinking that Mark Pattison had some reason for placing the dispute with Chappell in 1627, when he had Masson's dates before him. I would not accept Masson on trust, but I hesitate to dispose of Pattison without knowing the grounds on which he based his opinion.

(3) One can imagine a reason for placing the Diodati elegy first, but not for placing the Young elegy fourth (and misdating it into the bargain). The haec ego lines would be a strange envoy for a book which began with two poems on a deceased bishop and a university officer. That the end of the book has been subject to rearrangement is demonstrable. Why not also the beginning?

(4) I suspect that the absence of date for Elegy I is deliberate, and that probably Elegies VI and VII were originally left undated. Elegies II to V are all dated in the same way with Arabic numerals,

that all these poems are not only written in elegiacs, but, unlike the earlier poems in the metre, are closely imitative of Ovid in form and feeling. Yet, paradoxical though it may seem, it is precisely in this closeness of imitation that the emergence of the true personal utterance of the poet is to be seen. Milton is no longer showing his skill in versification: therefore he confines himself to the metre which he finds most easy and agreeable to nature's part in him. He is no longer one of the writers

quibus unum opus est ...
undique decerptam fronti praeponere olivam,

and does not seek to adorn his verses with graces culled from the whole range of Latin poetry. He too is now a poet and what he requires is not a collection of fine and

Note (9) continued from p.58.

possibly all at the same time. Does not the "Anno undevigesimo" of Elegy VII look like an afterthought? Possibly the contents of that elegy made Milton think that, in spite of his original intention, some indication of the author's youth would be advisable. I can understand that a man might at one time use Arabic numerals, and Latin on another occasion; but I cannot imagine him rearranging his copy and carefully dating it: "Anno aetatis 17, 17, 18, 20, undevigesimo." Nor can I suppose that he could deliberately or unintentionally misdate the fourth in a series in which nos. 2-5 are apparently arranged with scrupulous care. He must have missed no. 6 deliberately since he has dated the Nativity Ode, and I cannot but think that, if no. 1 had formed part of the same chronological sequence as nos. 2-5, he would have dated it as he has them.

serviceable phrases but a master who can help him to give utterance to his own emotions. The complaint in Elegy I is significant:

Nuda nec arva placent, umbrasque negantia molles,
Quam male Phoebicolis convenit ille locus!

We have met no such complaint before. The skilled writer of alcaic or hexameter exercises is always and everywhere a skilled writer of alcaic or hexameter exercises; but inspiration is largely a matter of mood and surroundings. Hence Milton's attraction to a poet with whom mood and surroundings count for so much.

Nor is it only in the Latin poems that this change in Milton's outlook is indicated. In a letter to Gill written in July, 1628, we find him criticising the state of things at Cambridge, and fearing lest the clergy should relapse into the sacerdotal ignorance of a former age. Some such thought no doubt had been in his mind when he drew his imaginary picture of Young in Elegy IV as the epitome of all that a priest should be:

Invenies dulci cum conjuge forte sedentem,
Mulcentem gremio pignora chara suo,
Forsitan aut veterum praelarga volumina patrum
Versantem, aut veri biblia sacra Dei.
Caelestive animas saturantem rore tenellas,
Grande salutiferae religionis opus.

From now onwards Milton ceases to be a mere unit

in the Cambridge educational machine. He now starts to work out his own scheme of salvation and, with true Miltonic greatness of heart, wishes to confer the benefits thereof on other people.

The lavish tributes paid to Young and Gill at this time are of peculiar interest. In rejecting Cambridge, Milton turns again to the teachers of his childhood - teachers he had been able to reverence with all his heart. We live by admiration, hope and love, and for Milton these were especially necessary. Unfortunately for him he met only too few people in the flesh who could command his admiration or his love.

(1) Two things seem certain in connection with Milton's life at Cambridge: (1) that he overcame an initial prejudice caused by his priggishness and was able to make himself agreeable not only to his contemporaries (Prolusio VI, Vacation Exercise, Hobson poems) but also to the fellows of his college (Apology &c. P.W. III, 111; Letter to Gill, July 2, 1628); (2) that at the time when this popularity first appears (1628) he has become a critic of Cambridge (Letter to Gill ut sup. Cf. later Apology &c. P.W. III, 112, Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 504). In Prolusio VII, written after this popularity was established, he complains of the interruption of his serious studies by the requirements of the university system.

The inference seems to be that Milton became popular when he learned to keep his own virtue to himself and to affect some sort of acceptance of other people's cakes and ale. No doubt his expectations were too high: no university could undertake to produce priests such as Milton demanded, nor to provide a curriculum which would satisfy all Milton's own requirements. But though he could pay tribute to "those ingenuous and friendly men" the fellows of his college, he never forgave the university system.

The second of his letters to Gill was written on July 2, 1628 - just after the prorogation of Parliament and a few weeks before the murder of Buckingham. His association with Gill at this time is a matter of great importance. On September 5 Gill was arrested because of certain outspoken and foolish remarks of his made at Oxford on the occasion of Buckingham's death. He was examined by Laud and then brought before the Star Chamber. There he was condemned to be degraded from the ministry, to lose his degree (B.D.), to be fined £2,000 and to lose one ear at London and the other at Oxford. The sentence was not carried out in full, but the example might well serve to deter Milton. Though he took his B.A. degree in March, 1629, and signed his assent to the Thirty-nine Articles, the Common Prayer and the King's Supremacy, he could not but perceive that he must give up all thought of taking orders. But there was perhaps another and hardly less potent reason for the change in his intentions. The Nativity Ode written the following Christmas and the elegy which accompanied it show that Milton had now found his new vocation.

5.

This had been foreshadowed in the previous year.

It is noteworthy that the year in which Milton sets up as critic of the Cambridge system should also furnish the first evidences of his poetic aspirations. In the lines At a Vacation Exercise three things especially are to be noted: the definite choice of the author's native language for the work which he has in mind, his express statement that he is troubled by a number of inarticulate emotions which are demanding expression, and his indication of the kind of subject with which he hopes to deal. If Ovid awakened the poet in Milton, the results of that awakening were such as to make it tolerably certain that Milton would not long be satisfied with Ovidian elegy. Already he has decided against Latin. Also the deep and only half-realised emotions now excited would inevitably carry him beyond the tutelage of a poet whose fluency and easiness in imitation were his chief attractions. Even now Milton is only too eager to devote himself to the higher flights of poetry, a task which Ovid is always anxious to shirk.

The lines in the Vacation Exercise, it has been pointed out, are obviously inspired by a passage in Sylvester's Du Bartas. Sylvester was not likely to be so popular an author at the university as was Ovid. Shall we therefore see in the reversion to this author of his boyish years a

further instance of Milton's return to his childhood's teachers?

We must note, in view of some conjectures on Milton's earliest poetic ambitions, ⁽²⁾ that the aspirations expressed in this poem are in no way Spenserian. Milton is not content with fairyland or moral allegory. He wishes to penetrate to the ultimate sources of things.

The desire to rise to a lofty poetic eminence whence he can survey the whole universal scheme is also expressed in the elegy In Adventum Veris, and serves to ⁽³⁾ distinguish that poem from its more Ovidian predecessors. Perhaps even more important are the lines Natura non pati Senium. In this poem we are taught to consider the motions ⁽⁴⁾ of the stars, we hear of wars between the gods in which

(2) e.g. Keightley (and Mitford whom he quotes) pp.398-99, Seeley: Lectures and Essays (Eversley edn.) p.144, and Masterman: Age of Milton, p.1.

(3) Yet Professor Rand says of this poem: "If Milton had written it on musty parchment and had somebody discover it, the Classical pundits of his day would have proved beyond question by all the tests of scholarship that a lost work of Ovid had come to light." Milton in Rustication, Studies in Philology, XIX, 111, 1922. I should like to think so highly of the pundits. Obviously it is an elegy such as the author of the Metamorphoses could have written, though no such elegy is found in his extant remains. But I am afraid that the pundits would be more likely to accept elegies which more closely resembled those that Ovid had actually written.

(4) vv. 37 ff.

mountains are used as missiles,⁽⁵⁾ and of immortals hurled
 headlong from heaven.⁽⁶⁾ The ruina with which one of these
 downfalls is accompanied cannot but remind us of the "hideous
 ruin" of Satan's fall, particularly as the half-dozen pre-
 ceding lines contain two other words similarly anglicised in
Paradise Lost - "convex" and "pole".⁽⁷⁾ One of the persons
 overthrown, it should be noted, is Mulciber, and the reference
 to Aegaeam Lemmon is so closely parallel to the passage in
Paradise Lost as to constitute in itself a sufficient refuta-
 tion of Bentley's suggested emendation.⁽⁸⁾

Not until the Ode on the Morning of Christ's
 Nativity, however, does Milton seriously attempt anything
 on the scale indicated in the Vacation Exercise. This ode
 together with the elegy which accompanied it marks a stage
 in Milton's poetic development. In the elegy are several
 points of contact with what had gone before, and it is in
 these perhaps that the change of attitude is most clearly
 perceptible. The playful excuse for conviviality and the

(5) 29-32.

(6) 23 ff.

(7) 26, 20, 21. Milton likewise anglicises consuluit rerum
 summae (34) in Paradise Lost VI, 673: "Consulting on the
 sum of things."

(8) 23, cf. Paradise Lost I, 746.

protest against unnecessary harshness suggest the tone of the sixth Prolusio, but what follows afterwards is in a different vein. Again the fact that this poem is in elegiacs and addressed to Diodati serves to connect it with Elegy I, but here instead of hearing Ovid extolled as equal to Homer we are definitely assured that the elegy is a type of poetry far beneath the Homeric epic. In Elegy I Milton had made a slight jocular reference to the story of Circe; now that story has become a moral allegory of vital importance. Formerly Milton had told Diodati of his own pleasures and enjoyments; now, though he is still ready to pardon his friend's frivolities, he is himself precluded from sharing them by the sense of his own great mission. The reign of Elegy is over. Henceforward Milton writes no more in elegiacs and indeed never uses Latin for his poetry except when there is some particular need for it.

The praise of Pythagoras in the elegy, and the references in the ode to the music of the spheres and the return of the Golden Age are also interesting as affording further evidence of Milton's return to his earlier pre-Ovidian ideals. He has now gone beyond the mawkish, self-indulgent lyricism which besets poetic adolescents. Once again he has found something greater than himself to which

he can devote himself wholeheartedly. The ideals which had inspired him in undertaking the preparation for the ministry are the ideals which now lead to his deliberate devotion to poetry. The poetic calling, as Milton now understood it, is itself a kind of priesthood.

6.

Milton himself attached considerable importance to this period of his life when he passed from the easy imitation of the elegiac poets to the lofty and arduous conception of poetry which governed his later efforts. In the Apology for Smectymnuus he explains how he came to believe "that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy."⁽⁹⁾ Here the credit for this conversion is given to Petrarch and Dante, although elsewhere the honour is allotted to Plato.⁽¹⁾ There is some

(9) P.W. III, 118.

(1) See the lines appended to the seventh elegy.

mention of Plato, however, in the Apology also, so that perhaps both claims may be admitted.

Nevertheless a change so far-reaching cannot be attributed solely to the fortuitous concurrence of outside forces. The ultimate motive power must have come from within, and the most that can be allowed either to the poets or the philosopher is that they accelerated and perhaps helped to define a movement which would have accomplished itself in any case. Milton's personality was now beginning to show strong and decided characteristics, and was not likely to be drawn out of its normal path by the reading of any author. He himself allows that all was not due to reading. We must also take account of that "certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness, and self-esteem either of what I was, or what I might be, (which let envy call pride), and lastly that modesty whereof ... here I may be excused to make some beseeming profession; all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to saleable and unlawful prostitutions." (2)

But though Milton's mental progress may be

(2) Apology for Smectymnus, P.W. III, 118.

regarded as quite natural and normal, there is that in the Nativity Ode which leads us to suspect that the composition of that poem at this time was neither natural nor normal. The ode is indeed a fine piece of work and attempts successfully flights which Milton had not tried before. The way in which he contrives to make an earthly incident stand out as the centre of a universal pageant already faintly suggests the manner of Paradise Lost. But Milton cannot yet control these large masses of material. He can set the world in motion, as can many lesser poets, but he does not yet possess the peculiarly Miltonic power of controlling its motions once started. His subject runs away with him, as he himself recognises -

Time is our tedious Song should here have ending,
and so, as well as he may, he brings it to some sort of conclusion. Could anything be more un-Miltonic?

The Passion also, which is obviously connected with the Nativity Ode, breaks off with the explanation: "This Subject the Author finding to be above the yeers he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfi'd with what was begun, left it unfinisht." This again is un-Miltonic; for one of Milton's characteristics is his habit of refraining from anything which lies beyond his powers. Thus, for example,

Paradise Lost is the obvious fulfilment of the ambition of the Vacation Exercise, and the development from the Vacation Exercise through the Nativity Ode to Paradise Lost is plain and direct; but the period between the failure of the Nativity Ode and the final achievement in Paradise Lost (3) is not marked by further experiments on the same scale. L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus and Lycidas are kept deliberately within narrower bounds.

It is here then, perhaps, that the influence of the poets cited in the Apology is to be sought. For though we be never so sceptical as to the influence which any author may exercise on the permanent development of a man's outlook, yet we both may and must believe that the example of one great poet can inspire another to unwonted efforts. It may even startle him to attempts of such magnitude that in the after vacancy he can only wonder at his own temerity. Petrarch, of course, will not count for much in this connection. But Dante, as Keats, Shelley and even Chaucer bear witness, has ever been the inspirer of gallant assaults on the most impregnable positions of Parnassus.

Yet the signs of Dante's influence in the Nativity Ode are not striking. The fact that the universal setting

(3) Though, of course, some shorter pieces achieve the same height, e.g. At A Solemn Music, On the Late Massacre, &c.

of the poem is conceived in Christian terms, rather than in the pagan manner of the Vacation Exercise, may indeed suggest that Milton has found some Christian bard whose works could bear comparison with the poems of ancient times. And who, we may ask, more likely than Dante? The description of the infant Saviour as a greater Sun may be defended from Dante's justification of the Sun as the most fitting symbol of the
(4)
Deity. The descent of Peace -

She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphear
His ready Harbinger -

who, by the waving of her wand, reduces all to quietness and concord, suggests the angel who came down at the gate of the City of Dis rather than the airy wheelings of Milton's own
(5)
Raphael. Finally, the "old Dragon underground" with his dread tail suggests a different conception of Satan from that found both in In Quintum Novembris and in Paradise Lost, but one closely resembling Dante's own in the Inferno.

Were it not for Milton's own assertion, one would

(4) Convivio, III, xii. Milton's copy was bought in 1629.

(5) "Sliding" might be said of Dante's angel, but not of Raphael. It is not suggested that these are more than possible allusions. The less obtrusive influence of Petrarch is detected by Joseph Warton in line 32, and it is possible that the metre owes something to such canzoni as Se'l pensier (in general arrangement) and S'il dissi mai (in the use of short lines).

attach much less importance to these possible reminiscences of Dante than to the more obvious signs of the influence of another great poet. It is indeed very obvious that the subject not only of the Nativity Ode but of The Passion and The Circumcision also was suggested by Spenser's Hymne of Heavenly Love.⁽⁶⁾ Then again, though Milton's greater Sun may be justified from Dante, it was none the less borrowed from Spenser.⁽⁷⁾ So also with the dragon. "The scaly horror of his folded tail" seems to be reminiscent of the Spenserian dragon encountered by Saint George.⁽⁸⁾ Not yet were the days when Spenser was to be extolled as a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, but he is already more than the smooth elegiac model of the Fair Infant lines.

Milton could have learned this from the elder Gill, and it may be for this reason that he does not mention Spenser in this connection. Young students of literature are not always so fond of praising the men to whom they owe most as of publishing abroad the praises of the geniuses they have themselves discovered. Conceivably also, Milton would have found some difficulty in dating Spenser in his autobiography.

(6) See below, Part II, Chapter V.

(7) Cf. Shepherd's Calendar, Aprill, 73-81.

(8) Faerie Queene, I, xi, ll. Compare also stanza 16.

The things he was coming to see in Spenser were things he had already been told of. There is of course a vast difference between remembering what one's schoolmaster used to say and having in one's self the experience, but the passage from merely notional acquiescence to the plenitude of conscious realisation did not come at a bound at one particular epoch. It was not a single and definite event, but an element in the whole movement of Milton's thought at this period. It is perhaps part of his general tendency to seek a new foundation in the teaching of his early years. No poem of Milton's owes so much to Colet's "Cristyn auctors" as does the Nativity Ode.⁽⁹⁾

7.

One of the circumstances which seem to invest the composition of the Nativity Ode with peculiar importance and suggest that it was prompted by some external stimulus is the fact that during the year preceding Milton had apparently written very little. Probably his time was taken up in developing his new scheme for the acquirement of universal knowledge. This is the ideal he sets before his hearers

(9) See Leach's notes on Prudentius ut supra and Cook's on Mantuan.

in the third Prolusio:

"Nor shall you fear to rise up to the heavens, and contemplate there the manifold forms of the clouds, the piled-up forces of snow, and the sources of morning dew; you shall search out the stores of hail and take account of the armouries of lightning; nor shall it be concealed from you what Jove or Nature intends when a huge and dire comet threatens fire in the sky, nor shall all the most minute stars be hid from you that are scattered between the poles. Yea, you shall accompany the sun in his motions, and call even Time to reckoning and exact the explanation of his eternal course. But let not your mind suffer itself to be contained and circumscribed within the same limits as the world, but let it stray even beyond the boundaries of the universe; and let it finally learn (which is yet the highest matter) to know itself, and at the same time those holy minds and intelligences with whom hereafter it is to enter into everlasting companionship. Why pursue the theme further? Let your model in all this be him who is in such favour, Aristotle, who has indeed left nearly all these matters learnedly and carefully written for our instruction."

The resemblance between this passage and the lines in the Vacation Exercise suggests that both were written about the same time, and this is important since the repetition of the theme in an official oration adds immensely to the significance of those lines. For they, being written for a sportive occasion, might be supposed not wholly serious in intent; the aim they profess is indeed but the common aspiration of young poets - a millenary hope to which they are content to look forward, yet take no practical steps to achieve. But Milton's intentions are definite and immediate, and in his hands this far-off poetic ideal becomes the guiding

principle in the prospectus of a real course of study - a prospectus which is prosaic enough even to prescribe a definite text-book.

It would appear, therefore, that Milton began his long and careful preparation for his high calling even when he first gave utterance to his poetic ambitions. If this were so indeed, it is not surprising that he should have written so little in the months immediately following this declaration. It was not characteristic of him to be in a hurry. His sense of the responsibility of his purpose was such that he "does not presse forward, as soon as many do, to undergoe, but keeps off with a sacred reverence and religious advisement how best to undergoe, not taking thought of beeing late, 'so it give advantage to be more fit." Whether this was his settled state of mind before the Nativity Ode, it is certain that this is the attitude he adopted afterwards. Henceforward he is a self-conscious probationer in the school of poetry. His ambitions lie entirely outside the restricted sphere of university interests. He writes no more poems on deceased dons or bishops, though he may pen trifles on the demise of the university carrier. It is interesting to note that it was at this time that the lines On Shakespear were written.

The importance of this tribute to his greatest predecessor in English poetry cannot be over-estimated. It shows that the greatest of our literary artists, the poet whose long and assiduous devotion to his art is almost without parallel, realised right at the outset that there were things which art alone could never achieve.

The best expression of Milton's principles at this time is to be found in the seventh Prolusio, which Masson thinks was probably his declamation for the M.A. degree. His subject - "Beatiores reddit Homines Ars quam Ignorantia" - was one which he was well fitted to expound, although necessarily he could not here express his own wishes so directly as he had done in the Vacation Exercise and in Prolusio III. In the former he had spoken merely of his own poetic intentions; in the latter, of the arts which ought to be cultivated in preference to the scholastic studies of the time: of poetry, rhetoric and history - of the arts, in short, which he himself preferred to study. But now he has to defend learning in general. He must speak therefore of arts and scholarship, when what he really has in mind is that "circular subsidy" of knowledge which is suited to the requirements of a poet rather than to those of a university doctor. Knowing that his audience cannot share

his enthusiasm for poetry, he must seek to move them by insisting on its analogy with oratory, with which they had more concern.

In oratory even as in poetry, he proclaims, the common or mediocre is intolerable. Yet excellence is only possible to him who is versed in all arts and all knowledge. He regrets therefore that the task of speech-making is thus prematurely thrust upon him at a time when he should be engaged in his preparatory studies. This is not a matter of personal inconvenience only, but a definite interference with a religious duty. The soul of man is immortal and indestructible, no mere product of the changing and corruptible elements around us, but proceeding directly from God himself. Why should God confer on us this almost inexhaustible power of understanding, if not to the end that we should aspire after knowledge? Again, as in the earlier Prolusio, he urges his hearers to study the whole realm of nature. And once more he reminds them that it is necessary to carry their thoughts beyond the limits of the visible universe: "So, at length, ... when once universal learning has finished its circles, the soul, not content with this darksome prison-house, will reach out far and wide till it shall have filled the world itself, and space beyond that,

in the divine expatiation of its magnitude."⁽¹⁾ By this time, though for the purposes of the present oration Milton does not say so, the student will be sufficiently learned in those

secret things that came to pass
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was,

to be able to undertake at least part of the task he had himself contemplated in the Vacation Exercise.

So far, however, we have but a partial statement of the kind of studies which Milton intended to pursue. Such designs might be entertained by other poets, Wordsworth for example, or Lucretius. Both the De Rerum Natura and The Excursion are concerned with the philosophic interpretation of the universe as actually present to their authors. Neither of them, however, takes account of the

Kings and Queens and Hero's old,

who also had their place in the scheme of the Vacation Exercise. If Lucretius uses the story of Iphigenia, it is not aesthetically as a subject for tragedy, but doctrinally as an illustration of a thesis. And Wordsworth, in his "love and holy passion" for this "goodly universe" and his desire to "speak of nothing more than what we are," could despise

(1) Masson's translation.

A history only of departed things
Or a mere fiction of what never was.

Milton, however, does not share this high philosophical exclusiveness. His guiding principles were more simple, sensuous and passionate. He knew that, aesthetically speaking, "what is appears," and for his purpose that which once was, though perchance it existed only in the realm of fable, had certain advantages over that which is so luminously unapparent that, aesthetically, it may be considered as not existing at all, although, philosophically, it may be admirably talked about. So even here, where the professed subject of his discourse is not poetry but mere learning, he cannot forget his kings and queens and heroes old.

"What additional pleasure it is to the mind," he exclaims, "to wing its way through all the histories and local sites of nations, and to turn to the accounts of prudence and of morals the conditions and mutations of kingdoms, states, cities and peoples! This is nothing less ... than to be present as if living in every age, and have been born as it were coeval with Time herself; verily, while for the glory of our name we look forward into the future, this will be to extend and outstretch life backward from the womb, and to extort from unwilling fate a certain foregone immortality." (2)

Here, if nowhere else, Milton speaks as the genius of his age. Far removed is he from the youthful stridencies of Elizabethanism. Even the best efforts of Burton or of

(2) Masson's translation.

Browne are weak and immature in comparison with this.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,

but here we find the poetic vision ranging not only through space but through time also. We have to do with an imagination that can devise habitations not local only but temporal too, and can body forth and turn to shapes even departed things. It was not merely upon the simple produce of the common day that Milton must exercise his power. And this habit of exercising his gift of poetic imagining not less in his reading than in his observation of the world around him enables him to do what scarcely any other poet has done in equal degree. "He saw Nature," quotes Johnson approvingly, "through the spectacles of books"; a good saying, but, like many such, true only in part and wholly paradoxical - a half-truth stated backwards. It were equally true to say that Milton read his books by the aid of those spectacles which other poets have used almost exclusively for the contemplation of nature. The literary reminiscences which are found in his works side by side with touches of original description show, not that Milton's knowledge of nature was bookish and prosaic, but that even his knowledge of books was anything but mere book-learning.⁽³⁾

(3) In Of Education Milton discourages book-learning and insists on solid knowledge; but he also insists on deriving it from books.

When Milton's intentions became known to his friends, some one of them seems to have remonstrated with him for devoting himself to this life of mere study so unpromising in practical results. Milton's excuse is interesting.⁽⁴⁾ Naturally he does not lay so much stress on the necessity for spending many years to gain "insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs"; he is

(4) There is some difficulty in dating this letter, which is found in the Cambridge MS. It was written before Comus (1634) with time for On Time and The Circumcision to intervene, and some time after the sonnet "How soon hath Time" - therefore some time since December, 1631. It seems unlikely that Milton would thus adduce this sonnet at any time after his twenty-fourth birthday, since it so obviously dates itself. Had the next birthday been past, or even imminent, the friend might seize upon this circumstance to reinforce his contention. Of what use was Milton's twelve-month-old suspicion of his belatedness if it had not stimulated him meantime to produce some other pledges of his intentions? I incline therefore to place the letter not much after the middle of 1632. The chief objection is that this involves moving Arcades back to 1632. But does not the usually accepted date (1633) bring Arcades rather nearer to Comus than its style warrants? Arcades has still some traces of fitfulness, of the timidity found in the Winchester epitaph. Of course, the immense pains taken with At a Solemn Music might, and I think did, insure a greater firmness and certainty of touch in the works which followed. But though this consideration would reduce the period required to bring about this change in style, it may suggest also that room should be made for L'Allegro and Il Penseroso between Arcades and Comus. L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are as obviously to be placed after the change as Arcades before it. Cf. The Poems of John Milton, ed. H.J.C.Grierson, 1925, vol. I, p.xiv.

called upon to show rather that the faith he places in his own powers is not altogether unjustified. He admits that he is troubled by a "certaine belatedness" in himself, but he is confident that, if late, he will be only the more fit for the work he has in mind. As proof of his efforts he forwards an experiment of his "in a Petrarchian stanza." Who Milton's correspondent was is unknown, but he must have been very discerning and appreciative if he could see anything in the Sonnet on arriving at the Age of Twenty-three that would indicate the future glories of Paradise Lost. But we, who know the great poem that was to be and the lengthy period of preparation which was to precede it, need not share his dissatisfaction. Milton was justified by the event, and it is not for us, therefore, to doubt his wisdom. If he thought it worth while at this time to experiment in "Petrarchian stanza" and considered these things worthy of attention, we must be prepared to follow him in these small beginnings and to realise that at this time metrical experiments were things of some importance.

The Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity is sufficient to show that Milton was no longer content to accept normal stanza-forms simply because they happened to

be at hand, but that he was seeking to develop a form of verse commensurate with his own requirements. In The Passion, it is true, he returns to the metre of the Death of a Fair Infant, but in that poem, taught by the failure of his Nativity Ode, Milton has reverted to the smooth elegiac manner. (9) The general tendency of his work at this time was, however, to eschew elegiac smoothness and to contrive a more vigorous and masculine form of verse.

His first essay, in the Vacation Exercise, was in the right direction, since the heroic couplet, as Dryden was later to show, may be a most powerful and effective measure when properly used. Milton however took the metre from Sylvester, an author little fitted to reveal its possibilities. But it was not, perhaps, because of Sylvester's crude handling of it that Milton did not use this form of verse more frequently. It is obvious that - as indeed both Pope and Dryden have remarked - the heroic couplet with its regular and machine-like recurrence of rhymes was in no way fitted to Milton's genius. In the finest and most inspired part of the Vacation Exercise he uses a large proportion of run-on lines, whereas the tamer and more deliberate lines at the opening are more usually

(9) See stanza iv.

end-stopt. This seems to indicate a fundamental incongruity between what he conceived to be the right use of the metre and the use which alone might have made it a possible medium for his utterance. If he had once adopted the regular recurrence of rhyme in couplets as the ground principle of his verse-structure, he could not, like Chamberlayne, have written with the freedom of blank verse, making of the rhymes themselves things of no importance. The ear which created the verse harmonies of Paradise Lost could not tolerate such a proceeding. Yet the melodic line of Milton's movements could hardly live within the narrow spaces of the closed couplet. Milton's later use of the couplet is generally end-stopt, except - significantly - for some of the best lines in Arcades, but he never makes it the medium of his greatest poetry. On Shakespear, the two Hobson poems and Arcades are chiefly remarkable as showing that he has discovered something of the possibilities of the metre in giving point to witticism (hardly satire) and to panegyric.

It may perhaps seem remarkable that Milton did not attempt the Spenserian stanza. Here at least he would not find that remorselessly regular succession of rhymes coming two by two, hard upon each other's heels. He seems

to have been impressed by the effect of Spenser's Alexandrine, but this is all of the Spenserian stanza that he introduces into the verse of the Nativity Ode. The rest of it is of less certain derivation. Its short lines appear to be built on a pure stress basis of three beats to the line, and the use of them in pairs -

Nature in aw to him
Had doff't her gawdy trim -

suggests rather a long line of six beats with an emphatic pause and internal rhyme. This, taken with the use of the Alexandrine, may suggest that Milton was looking for a verse of more ample scope than the ordinary decasyllable. The use of lines of varying length suggests another of his needs. The problem raised by these requirements was met later on by his taking the paragraph rather than the line as the metrical unit, although the choruses in Samson Agonistes indicate that Milton did not regard this solution as final. In the Nativity Ode certainly he has not found his medium. His verse is strong but jolting; in no way does it suggest the planetary wheelings of Paradise Lost.

The Song on a May Morning and the Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester are experiments of a different sort. The May Morning shows that Milton had already learned to give his octosyllables either an iambic or a trochaic lilt

- a discovery of importance in view of the later L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. But he is still very far from achieving such works as these, as the Epitaph signifies, not only by its verbosity, but by the presence of such lines as:

Summers three times eight save one

or

And som Flowers, and som Bays.

The two sonnets To the Nightingale and On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three, on the other hand, deserve particular attention. It is significant that Milton himself refers to the second of these not as a sonnet but as a Petrarchian stanza, thus emphasising the difference between it and the sonnets of Elizabethan days. These, with their three disconnected quatrains and their concluding couplet, had nothing to offer Milton. But the Petrarchan form of sonnet was of grander and more complicated structure - a continuous strain of poetic utterance of greater amplitude than Milton could have found in any other stanza-form. The Spenserian, we might think, were ample enough, but after all it is only a stanza (as the sonnet, with all deference to Milton, is not) and can only do the work of a stanza. It can present a complete picture or one section of a picture, but its music cannot be carried on. The concluding

Alexandrine definitely closes and rounds off each separate stanza, and in the next we must begin again. The sonnet is more than this. Its opening octave presents the same opportunities as the Spenserian; but, instead of the Alexandrine which prevents further progress, there is now
(1)
a way out: the development of the thought may take a new turn in the sestet which follows. When we look forward to the long drawn out harmonies of At a Solemn Music or of Lycidas, we can see whither Milton was tending. What he required was something as perfect and satisfying as the sonnet, yet something capable of being extended to any required length.

9.

One would like to know more of the range of ideas and of information that Milton carried with him from Cambridge. Did he, for instance, hear Mede deliver that sermon in which he rejected the whole Dionysian hierarchy of angels, and set up instead a new system of angelic polity on the basis of the

(1) This aspect of the sonnet was, of course, not revealed to him by Petrarch but by Della Casa, whose works Milton purchased along with the Convivio. See Smart's edition of the Sonnets, pp.30 ff. Dr. Smart also insists on the importance of the Sonnets in the development of Milton's blank verse, pp.27-28.

seven angels of Jewish legend? ⁽²⁾ Had he listened to Mede's refutation of the idea that the "unreasonable and brute serpent" could have tempted Eve, and his consequent explanation that "it was that old Deceiver, the Devil and Satan, who abused the brute Serpent, either by entering ⁽³⁾ into him, or taking his shape upon him"?

Our ignorance in these matters is the more to be regretted since the ideas which Milton gained at this period must have played a great part in the formation of his poetic character. This at least is suggested by the number of themes in the writings of this time which he employed again in later works. In Elegy III "the frolic wind that breathes the Spring" appears in circumstances which suggest his later appearance in L'Allegro, though the actual statement of his love for Flora looks forward rather to a line in Paradise ⁽⁴⁾ Lost. In the same elegy the periphrasis applied to Aurora ⁽⁵⁾ similarly recalls her association with "the Attic boy".

The Muses of Il Penseroso who

(2) The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D. London, 1677. Discourse X, p.40, on Zach. iv, 10. Cf. Raleigh: Milton, p.114.

(3) Ibidem, Discourse XL, p.223.

(4) Elegy III, 43-44; L'Allegro, 18; Paradise Lost, V, 16.

(5) Elegy III, 67, "Cephaleia pellice"; Il Penseroso, 124.

in a ring,
 Ay round about Joves Altar sing,
 (6)
 are already found in Prolusio II, while the reference to
 the fairies in the Nativity Ode is the first suggestion of
 a theme used later both in L'Allegro and in Paradise Lost. (7)
 The Ovidian figure of Tragedy practises her paces in Elegy
 (8)
I before appearing in Il Penseroso, and the

celestial Sirens harmony,
 That sit upon the nine enfolded Sphears,
 (9)
 is first heard in Prolusio II. The emphatic laudation of
 "divine philosophy" in Comus is foreshadowed by Prolusiones
 (1)
III, IV and VI, and one of the most delightful touches in
 that poem, the theme of the flower destroyed by rustic
 insensibility -

The dull swain
 Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon -
 is already suggested in the Epitaph on the Marchioness of
 (2)
Winchester. The flowers and bays of the same Epitaph
 and its "tears of perfect moan" were to be marvellously
 transformed in Lycidas, and "the yellow cowslip and the
 pale primrose" of the Song on May Morning were to enjoy a

(6) P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, 154; Il Penseroso, 47-48.

(7) Nativity Ode, 235; L'Allegro, 100; Paradise Lost, I, 781.

(8) Elegy I, 37; Il Penseroso, 97.

(9) Arcades, 63-64; P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, 154.

(1) Comus, 476; P.W. (ed. Symmons) VI, pp.158, 161-62, 171.

(2) Comus, 634-35; Epitaph, 35-38.

like distinction. (3) Even the Homeric phrase used so effectively afterwards in a well-known passage in Areopagitica is anticipated in the

(4) pondus inutile terrae
of Elegy II.

It is a far cry from these works to Paradise Lost, and many years will elapse before Milton even begins to recognise the true subject of his great epic. But, though he knows it not, his theme is on the way to discover itself. He has already expressed his desire to follow in the steps of Homer; (5) already he wishes to write a cosmogonical poem setting forth the

secret things that came to pass
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was;

that he would fain write a great religious poem is witnessed by his acceptance of the theme suggested by Spenser's Hymne of Heavenly Love.

But this direct testimony is not all, and at least equal importance must be attached to the unconscious tendency of his mind which is indicated by his constant preoccupation with the theme of the Age of Gold. This, as

(3) Epitaph, 57, 55; Lycidas, 1-14. Song, 4; Lycidas, 147-50.

(4) Elegy II, 19; P.W. (Bohn) II, 55; Iliad, XVIII, 104.

(5) Elegy VI.

we have seen, was to Milton no mere poetic fancy. His most deeply-rooted conviction was that the whole universe should be a perfect harmony. The normal state of humanity should be the state of paradisaal innocence in which man too could share in the

undisturbed Song of pure concent
of the whole creation. But this, by reason of man's wickedness, cannot be till

at the worlds last session,
The dreadful Judge in middle Air shall spread his throne.
The harmony which Milton desires is not to be found in any stage of human society which has been or shall be before the second coming of Christ, unless we go back to the days before
disproportion'd sin
Jarr'd against natures chime.

As yet, however, Milton has not learned to look back to those times.

The subject of Paradise Lost is not yet discovered, but there is much even now which helps us to understand how it will take shape in Milton's hands. Already Satan, in In Quintum Novembris, is presented, not as a dragon underground, but as a tempter and as a mighty potentate winging his passage round the earth. Already we hear of his two weapons, "open war" and "covert guile",⁽⁶⁾ and even

(6) In Quint. Novemb., 113-14. Cf. Paradise Lost, II, 41.

now guile apparently is preferred. (7) "The fellows of his
crime, the followers rather," (8) are mentioned, but the
place of their habitation is not presented, being but
briefly referred to as

(9)
infandam, regnum illaetabile, Lethen.

From other sources, however, we learn that the "pendent
world" (1) is prevented only by the influence of light from
being invaded by the primeval Chaos. (2) We learn, too, of
a race of furies in Erebus, eager to take possession of
the earth. (3) Somewhere in the extramundane region Briareus
lies bound with adamantine chains, (4) and Demagorgon (here
identified with Chaos) has his abode. (5) We read also of
sphinxes and harpies, gorgons and chimaeras, (6) and of the
incestuous embraces of a female personification (7) whence

(7) Ibid, 6, 17.

(8) Ibid, 10, "sceleris socios, vernas fideles." Cf. P.L.I, 606.

(9) Ibid, 132.

(1) In obitum Procancelarii medici, 3, "pendulum telluris orbem."

(2) Prolusio I, P.W.(Symmons) VI, 151. Cf. Paradise Lost II, 1034-40.

(3) Ibid, VI, 149.

(4) Ibid, VI, 145.

(5) Ibid, VI, 146.

(6) Ibid, VI, 152. Cf. Paradise Lost, II, 629.

(7) Ibid, VI, 146.

comes the birth of all evils: Distress, Envy, Fear, Fraud,
(8)
Poverty, Hunger, Disease, Old Age and Death.

So far, however, Milton's interest in these dismal regions is not fully aroused. His controversial experience was yet but slight, and his thoughts, as befitted one who lived as ever in his great Taskmaster's eye, were otherwise inclined. Heaven is for ever in his thoughts. In the Death of a Fair Infant he must needs derive the subject of his verse from the Elysian fields, or credit her with having enjoyed previous companionship with the winged host of angels. The child came from Heaven to direct our thoughts thither; so did Pythagoras in the Prolusio. It was our duty, Milton insisted, to aspire beyond the bounds of the visible universe, which precept he carried out in his own practice. He cannot even make his wretched jokes on the Gunpowder Plot without sending James to heaven. More serious are his own heavenly flights in the poems on the deaths of Andrewes and Felton. These, however, suggest less of his later treatment of the subject than does the

boosom bright

Of blazing Majesty and Light
of the Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester.

(8) Ibid, VI, 148.

Milton's constant tendency to escape to heaven whenever an opportunity occurs has been often remarked. Even more important, however, is his manner of emphasising the significance of his theme, whenever possible, by giving it a universal setting. This is particularly noteworthy in the Nativity Ode. In The Passion he deliberately contracts his scope, confining his Muse to certain earthly scenes. But even thus bound, his Phoebus requires the aid of Ezekiel's chariot to bear him in his journeyings. The later fragment Upon the Circumcision returns to the manner of the Nativity Ode, and summons the

flaming Powers, and winged Warriours bright,
That erst with Musick, and triumphant song
First heard by happy watchful Shepherds ear,
So sweetly sung your Joy the Clouds along

(9)

to share once more in his song. For such a theme as Paradise Lost, as we may well understand, a universal setting would be essential. To Milton, Sin was a breach in the whole harmony of the universe, a foul deformity in nature for which even the Sun might hide his head in shame. We shall therefore not be surprised when Milton comes to sing of that first disobedience which

Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
to find that he requires the whole creation, visible and invisible, for the setting of his story.

(9) Cf. The Passion, stanza 1.

CHAPTER III.

HORTON.

And Wisdoms self
Oft seeks to sweet retired Solitude,
Where with her best nurse Contemplation
She plumes her feathers, and lets grow her wings
That in the various bussle of resort
Were all to ruffl'd, and sometimes impair'd.
Comus.

1.

After leaving Cambridge, Milton lived for five years in his father's house at Horton. During this time he wrote L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus and Lycidas. We needs must love the highest when we see it, and we cannot help realising that these are very great poems, poems indeed which some have extolled to the top of admiration, preferring them even to Paradise Lost. For our present purposes, however, the Horton period is not a time of actual achievement, or, rather, its achievements are important merely as an indication of the progress of the great work of preparation. Our concern is not with the poet of L'Allegro and Lycidas, and in our treatment of these poems

we must see to it that our evil tongues do no injury to the vato futuro of Paradise Lost.

Milton's own attitude to these poems is indicated in no uncertain fashion by the mottoes which he attached to the volume of 1645 and to the first edition of Comus. Equally decisive is his letter to Diodati written in September, 1637. "Do you ask what I am meditating? By the help of Heaven, an immortality of fame." But what is he doing to secure this immortality? Is he revising the first draft of Comus or preparing to write an elegy on the recent death of Edward King? His own words have in them a more modest working. "I am letting my wings grow and preparing to fly; but my Pegasus has not yet feathers enough to soar aloft in the fields of air." It is remarkable that in The Reason of Church Government, when he is describing his early training under "sundry masters and teachers", Milton thinks fit to insist on the "style" of his work and on "certain vital signs it had." So too he refers to the encomiums with which his verses were received in Italy, although he admits that the verses in question were but "some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout ... and other things, which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them."⁽¹⁾ Yet, strangely,

(1) P.W. (Bohn) II, 477.

* The Bohn edition (II, 477) and Symonds (I, 118) both have "reason."
"Regum" is the reading of the Amsterdam edition (1698) p. 221.

from this treatise we get no suggestion that Milton himself , or any of his friends had perceived any virtue in such works as Comus or Lycidas. In the Second Defence, to be sure, he refers directly to Wotton's letter, but even then he makes no mention of Comus.

What he chose to record of his life at Horton was that he spent his time in the study of the Greek and Latin classics, visiting the metropolis occasionally to buy books and to learn something new in mathematics or music.⁽²⁾ In the letter to Diodati to which we have already referred he gives a further account of his studies:

"I went through the perusal of the Greek authors to the time when they ceased to be Greeks; I was long employed in unravelling the obscure history of the Italians under the Lombards, the Franks, and the Germans, to the time when they received their liberty from Rodolphus, King of Germany. From that time it will be better to read separately the particular transactions of each state."⁽³⁾

In L'Allegro and Il Penseroso Milton appears, not as "a poet, soaring in the high region^{*} of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him," but as a student who describes something of his daily life in easy and charming verse.

Yet though Milton's energies were not bent up to

(2) Second Defence, P.W. I, 255.

(3) P.W. III, 495.

to the achievement of such poems as these, poetry itself is still his chief concern. What he seeks is not mere learning, but "the perfect model of the beautiful in all the forms and appearances of things."⁽⁴⁾ Nor did Ceres, as he truly observes, ever seek her daughter Proserpina with such unceasing solicitude. Nor did Keats's Endymion, we may add, ever travel through remoter or less promising labyrinths in search of beauty than did Milton in his unravelling of these obscure histories. We need not wonder that his father found it hard to understand his designs, and it is difficult to believe that even Diodati could enter into them completely. Milton himself confesses that he is slow in writing. He regards this as an added reason for devoting himself more assiduously to the work of preparation, but others no doubt would view the matter differently.

The remoteness of his object, the appalling extent of the studies he had undertaken, and the brilliant and easily-won success of less gifted people⁽⁵⁾ who had chosen an easier way of poetry and of life might, and in fact did, cause even Milton to wonder sometimes whether

(4) Ibid, 494.

(5) Cf. Sonnet "How soon hath Time."

'twere not better done, as others use,

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade.

Such a mood, of course, was only occasional, but it is noteworthy that it should occur at all. For Milton was not an author who had sought the public ear and been disappointed. The only people from whom he could have expected sympathy or understanding were those of his own immediate circle. It is not likely that any of these failed to appreciate the poems he was then writing. All the evidence points the other way. What then can have caused this feeling of loneliness, of the futility of pursuing ideals which no one but himself can understand? Perhaps it was because they liked his poems too well. It is not impossible to suppose that most cultured persons of Milton's acquaintance would be as emphatic in their laudation of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as they were dubious of the wisdom of Milton's intentions. The author of these poems undoubtedly had the root of the matter in him. Why should a man with such exquisite sensibilities perplex himself with ponderous studies and prosaic moral aims?

2.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso still have an irresist-

ible appeal even for those whose different views on life have taught them to look with suspicion on most of Milton's other poems. Their author has no conscious design upon us. We are not asked to consider matters of doctrine but to appreciate perfection of form. The two poems present two moods rather than two points of view, and the balanced contrast which they present affords an example of purely artistic poise which is not found in Comus, for example, or Lycidas. The construction of these poems, however, must have cost Milton much thought and, slight as these pieces must appear in relation to his later works, the solid four-square planning of them already suggests the capable engineering to which Paradise Lost owes so much. The deliberate arrangement and setting-out of his material is nowhere more apparent than in these poems. The form does not grow out of the poetic substance; rather it carefully adapts that substance for its own adornment.

The substance indeed was just what lay nearest to Milton's hand, just the material one would expect him
(6)
to use for such an exercise. Until the time for the great poem shall arrive, there is only one subject that

(6) He had already used it for another formal exercise - the Petrarchian stanza.

really interests Milton - the personal development of the young poet who is destined eventually to write that poem. This is the theme of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, as it had been of the Sonnet on Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three. His interest in this young poet, though benign, was not doting. A ruthlessly high standard was expected, and Milton was quick to apprehend possible shortcomings. Apparently, however, the only real danger that threatened him was his excessive seriousness.

The contrast between the thoughtful man and the cheerful man is often insisted on in Milton's correspondence with Diodati, and there must have been times when Milton asked himself how it was that his own outlook differed so much from Diodati's. He would be unwilling to censure his friend, but if Diodati was right, did that mean that he himself was wrong? Was he in danger of becoming a stern and gloomy scholar without joy or gaiety? No doubt he answered the question to his own satisfaction by counting over to himself some of the many things in which he took delight. He too had his pleasures though they might not be the same as Diodati's. He, *Penseroso*, the thoughtful man could be cheerful in his own way.

Herein lies the importance of these exercises.

In his officially poetic moods, Milton had been a little too apt to stress the necessity of scorning delights and living laborious days. And thus no small portion of his personal interests and feelings would never have found expression in his poetry, had it not been for these exercises. In spite of their more modest intention, these pieces contain more of poetry than is to be found in the Nativity Ode. Partly, of course, this is due to Milton's care in keeping well within his powers of expression. Much also is due to the more congenial circumstances in which these later poems were written. But even more important is the fact that here for once Milton condescends to tell us of his delights as well as of his aspirations. "The Ode," says Mark Pattison with truth, "is frosty, as written in winter, within the four walls of a college chamber. The two idylls breathe the free air of spring and summer, and of the fields round Horton. They are thoroughly naturalistic; the choicest expression our language has yet found of the fresh charm of country life, not as that life is lived by the peasant, but as it is felt by a young and lettered student, issuing at early dawn, or at sunset, into the fields from his chamber and his books."

Nor let us think because Milton's was essentially a student's love of the country that it was on that account weak and artificial. We should be ill-advised to impugn Wordsworth's appreciation of literature on the grounds that "Books" form only a short interlude in the story of his mental life. So therefore, though the seedtime of Milton's soul was passed almost entirely in study, and though in his development Nature was only an interlude, it was an interlude of great importance. It did not give him the exact knowledge of the man who has been brought up from childhood in rural surroundings. But even Wordsworth would admit that the student may see things in nature that the true rustic may not see. There is at least a "human-heartedness" about Milton's love of the countryside such as Wordsworth did not discover in himself until he also returned from Cambridge. L'Allegro takes the keenest delight in all the rural sights and sounds: the chiming of the hounds and the note of the horn, the ploughman whistling o'er the land and the singing of the milkmaid. Rustic merrymakings are neither despised nor condemned:

Som times with secure delight
The up-land Hamlets will invite,
When the merry Bells ring round,
And the jocond rebecks sound
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the Chequer'd shade;
And young and old com forth to play
On a Sunshine Holyday,
Till the live-long day-light fail.

But to Milton the countryside meant more than this.
He was no rustic though he shared the rustics' joys. His
were

Such sights as youthfull Poets dream
On Summer eeves by haunted stream,

and we may well suppose that the haunted streams were his
retreat more often than the upland hamlets. His interest
in the country people and their doings did not take up the
whole of his attention. Even as he listens to the plough-
man's whistle or the milkmaid's song, the centre of his
interest is much further removed:

Right against the Eastern gate,
Wher the great Sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveries dight;

and immediately afterwards his eye, measuring the landscape
round, rests with pleasure on

Russet Lawns, and Fallows Gray,

or on

Mountains on whose barren brest
The labouring clouds do often rest.

So too Penseroso goes his solitary walks to listen to the
nightingale or

To behold the wandring Moon,
Riding neer her highest noon,
Like one that hath bin led astray
Through the Heav'ns wide pathles way.

The early morning which follows his all-night vigil is even more striking than the sunrise in L'Allegro:

While rocking Winds are Piping loud,
Or usher'd with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the ruffling Leaves,
With minute drops from off the Eaves.

A pleasing characteristic of these poems is the interest shown in folk-lore. The description of Puck, for example, owes more to popular superstition than to Shakespeare. Milton, no doubt, knew Jonson's Sad Shepherd and may have drawn on that; but there must have been some personal interest which caused him to remember Jonson's woodnotes rather than some of his other works, especially in the poem which lays such stress on Jonson's learning. Evidently Milton recognises that learning is not everything. This is sufficiently indicated in his praise of Shakespeare, which is set in a different key from that of the poem which Milton had written for the Second Folio. There Shakespeare had been a "son of memory" - a brother, apparently, of the learned sisters. As such he required no "slow-endeavouring art," being already possessed of all that art sought to attain. In L'Allegro, however, the "Delphic lines" of the earlier poem have become "native woodnotes wild", and the sharp contrast with Ben Jonson suggests that now Shakespeare's genius is regarded as differing

not in degree only but also in kind from that of the slow-endeavouring artist.

After this it is perhaps not surprising that the one English poet mentioned in Il Penseroso should be the most ingenuous of bards - Chaucer himself. In him Milton evidently took great delight. The cock and his dames in L'Allegro are not taken from Chaucer, but we cannot doubt that the Nun's Priest's Tale had taught Milton to look at cocks and hens in a more humorous and kindly way than so serious a scholar might be expected to do. It will be objected, of course, that this, like all true humour, is an ingenuousness born of sophistication. To which we may reply that it is not as a humourist that Chaucer is invoked in Il Penseroso, and that there is certainly ingenuousness of another sort in Milton's liking for

The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That own'd the vertuous Ring and Glass,
And of the wondrous Hors of Brass,
On which the Tartar King did ride.

Let us not be misled by

Where more is meant than meets the ear.

There is nothing of that in the Squire's Tale, and Milton does not seem to approve of Spenser's attempt to put it there: he prefers the story "left half told". He liked

allegory and good doctrine, but he also loved Romance.

Above all he was Milton: he knew when things were right.

Thus, then, despite his professed devotion to Hermetical and Platonic philosophy, there was also in the Milton of this period something much more primal and humane. It is only in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso that we are permitted to see this aspect of the man's character. We shall do wrong, however, if we assume that it was therefore unimportant and non-essential. The spirit that inspires these poems was not something in the air which came to Milton unasked and which he did his best to forget. On the other hand, it was deliberately cultivated and jealously preserved. Too often have the critics of Milton disregarded or interpreted amiss those elements in his character which caused him to introduce fairies and the romances of chivalry even into Paradise Lost. Too seldom have they understood that it was the poet of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso who,

Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes
Adjoynd,

had learned to take delight in

The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,
Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound,

and had looked so often upon the approach of morning and evening

- sights which the poet of Paradise Lost lacked eyes to see. Yet morning and evening are found in Paradise Lost, and found where we should not expect them. Despite his blindness, he was the same Milton. He remembered the earth he had seen and was not to see again, and he could be well content with a heaven which should be little better. He might console himself by supposing that the earth whose light was so easily lost was but the shadow of the real world. But even the real world must not be so obviously intransitory as to lose all likeness to the shadow he had loved. Heaven also must have its morning and evening.

3.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are chiefly responsible for the legend of the early Elizabethan Milton; and certainly these poems have many Elizabethan qualities. But we may not assume that these qualities are due solely to the fact that Milton happened to be born while Shakespeare and Jonson were alive. If he had indeed imbibed this Elizabethanism in childhood, it is strange that it does not appear more plainly in his earlier works. We may suppose, if we will, that the spirit of former times had lingered later in country places like

Horton than in the metropolis; but even when we have made the fullest allowance for such possible "authentic" sources, it seems fairly certain that the Elizabethanism of these poems was derived largely through purely "literary" channels. Having in himself an experience would not excuse Milton the labour of industrious and select reading. He must apologise even for a personal letter of acknowledgement if written, perforce, in the absence of books.

Thus, though the theme of these poems was founded on the circumstances of Milton's own life, numerous reminiscences in both poems suggest that he had read with attention Burton's lines prefixed to the Anatomy of Melancholy. His obvious familiarity with Burton's chapter "Exercise rectified both of Body and Mind" may suggest both why he turned to the Anatomy at this time and also how he came to find in it not only some hints for a poem on melancholy but perhaps also the suggestion which prompted his decision to set beside this a complementary poem in praise of mirth. It is evident that many things in L'Allegro, no less than in Il Penseroso, were borrowed from Burton. We may note, for example, Burton's commendation of country recreations: "May-games, Feasts, Wakes, and Merry Meetings"; "the very being in the Country" is itself a pleasure. He mentions also indoor amusements

including "merry tales of Errant Knights, Queens, Lovers, Lords, Ladies, Giants, Dwarfs, Thieves, Cheaters, Witches, Fairies, Goblins, Friars, &c.," and considers that "Dancing, Singing, Masking, Mumming, Stage-plays" may justly be approved. "The very reading of feasts, triumphs, interviews, nuptials, tilts, tournaments, combats, and monomachies, is most acceptable and pleasant." He mentions romances such as "Amadis de Gaul, the Knight of the Sun, the Seven Champions, Palmerin de Oliva, Huon of Bordeaux," but here he differs from Milton in thinking that the Inamoratoes who study such works are likely to "prove in the end as mad as Don Quixote."

"The very being in the country" as a cause of enjoyment was a text which had been amply illustrated by Elizabethan poets. Thus, for example, Nicholas Breton:

Who can live in heart so glad
As the merry country lad?
Who upon a fair green baulk
May at pleasure sit and walk,
And amid the azure skies
See the morning sun arise;
While he hears in every spring
How the birds do chirp and sing;
Or, before the hounds in cry,
See the hare go stealing by;
Or, along the shallow brook
Angling with a baited hook,
See the fishes leap and play
In a blessed sunny day;
Or to hear the partridge call
Till she have her covey all;

Or to see the subtle fox,
How the villain plies the box,
After feeding on his prey
How he closely sneaks away,
Through the hedge and down the furrow,
Till he gets into his burrow.

(7)

Such strains as these are obviously echoed in L'Allegro.

Many other things there are in both poems which seem to be borrowed from Elizabethan sources. Perhaps the most striking are the opening anathematisations, which may be paralleled in Marston and Fletcher, and the concluding

(8)

(7) And Breton's succession of infinitives is therefore a better guide to the interpretation of L'Allegro 45-46 than the lines of Sylvester quoted by Warton, of which Milton had apparently only a distant and very confused recollection. Todd's citation of Heywood:

Our musick from the birdes we borrow,
They bidding us, we them, good morrow,
shows that the bidding could be either way.

(8) Marston: Scourge of Villanie,

Sleepe, grim Reproof! My iocund Muse doth sing
In other keyes to nimbler fingering;
Dull-sprighted Melancholy, leaue my braine,
To hell, Cimmerian Night. In liuely vaine
I striue to paint; then hence all darke intent,
And sullen frownes. Come, sporting Merriment,
Cheeke-dimpling Laughter, crowne my verie soule
With jouissance.

Cf. Midsummer Night's Dream, I, i,

Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals.

Fletcher: Nice Valour,

Hence all you vain Delights,
As short as are the nights,
Wherein you spend your folly,
There's nought in this life sweet,
If man were wise to see't,
But only melancholly,
Oh sweetest melancholly.

lines, which are in the manner of Marlowe's ending of his Passionate Shepherd. We may indeed press the resemblance to Marlowe a little further. The passionate shepherd of the poem gives a long catalogue of the pleasures he has to offer and then says,

If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

So we might regard L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as being essentially enumerations of all the delights which Mirth and Melancholy must offer if they are to gain the poet's affection. Such indeed they are; but, as a matter of fact, we do not regard them in this way. Such a conception of the poems does not occur to us until we reach the last two lines of each. The true structural principle of these pieces is not that of the Marlowesque catalogue. It is something other than this which gives them their unity of design and continuity of interest. And in thus rising superior to this typically Elizabethan crudity of structure, Milton shows how little of an Elizabethan he really was. Your true Elizabethan measured his "pleasant delights," not

Note (8) continued from p. 111.

Cf. Sylvester's translation of Pierre Matthieu: Henrie the Great,

Hence, hence false Pleasures, momentary Ioyes;

Mock vs no more with your illuding Toyes.

Fletcher's lines, be it noted, also suggested a reply in praise of mirth to Strode. See Arber's Jonson Anthology, p.239.

by structural perfection in their arrangement, but quantitatively - by the "handful". But Milton, though it may please him to play with Elizabethan themes, still retains his prerogative as a great artist.

In these poems the artist's hand is seen everywhere. Note, for example, how the theatrical posturing of Fletcher's

 Welcome folded Arms, and fixed Eyes,
 A sigh that piercing mortifies,
 A look that's fast'ned to the ground,
 A tongue chain'd up without a sound,

is chastened into poetic relevance in Il Penseroso, and how in L'Allegro the exuberant assertion of pastoral delights so common in Elizabethan poetry is reduced to artistic, and aesthetically credible, dimensions.

 On a Sunshine Holyday
is not one of L'Allegro's best lines, but Breton's

 In a blessed sunny day
shows that he at least could not hit it; and his lengthy rigmarole about

 that shepherdess
 To whose eyes all shepherds yield
 All the fairest of the field,
 Fair Aglaia, in whose face
 Lives the shepherd's highest grace,

running on for line upon line, illustrates admirably what most Elizabethans would have done with

 The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes.

Even the controversy - an expense of spirit in a waste of ineptitude - which raged round the claims of blackness to bear "beauty's name" and which has devastated so many fair tracts of Elizabethan verse is made to serve the ends of poetry:

Black, but such as in esteem,
Prince Memnons sister might beseem.

This, of course, is not to say that there was no one living in Elizabethan times who was capable of giving artistic form to poems of such length as L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. There was at least the author of The Shepheardes Calender and of Epithalamion. Spenser, however, as we cannot but realise, was something more than an Elizabethan. Not otherwise could he have been Milton's original. To appreciate his purpose and achievement demands a knowledge not only of the contemporary literature of England, but of Classical literature also and that of modern Italy. With Milton this is even more necessary.

4.

Milton's reading had been guided at the outset by the usual classical studies of the time, studies in which Latin played a much greater part than Greek. In those days

even minor Latin authors of the Silver Age were much more frequently read than the tragedians or Thucydides, although on the other hand Plutarch was only too well-known. Consequently the usual conception of the ancient world and of the relations of the two classical literatures took little account of the Age of Pericles, but was based largely on the Graeco-Roman period. The point of view was always Roman, and Greek authors were interpreted according to Roman ideas. Homer, of course, was read, but he was regarded as a Greek Virgil, a little cruder, as befitted his less enlightened age, and, in compensation for this, rather more vigorous. The tragedians seem to have been more talked about than read; certainly the reading of them bore no important results. It was not the Athenians but the Roman Seneca who exercised so profound an influence on the tragedy of the sixteenth century.

This Latin bias was a relic of pre-Renaissance days when Latin had been still a living language and Greek was quite forgotten. Milton was so far affected by it that in early years he devoted much attention to Latin and English composition, but neglected Greek since "he who at this time employs his labour and his time in writing Greek, is in danger of writing what will never be read."⁽⁹⁾ Greek in fact was a

(9) Letter to Gill, 1634 (trans.) P.W. III, 491.

dead language, whereas there was an unbroken succession of Latin literature from the Silver Age and the Fathers down to Milton's own day.

But though this Latin literature was living, it was essentially dull and sophisticated. It could be of little use to the future poet. For him the Latin literature which really mattered was that which had culminated in Virgil and had died soon afterwards. The progress of poetry has nothing to do with the continuity of a literary dialect, nor is the true greatness of Virgil to be perceived by those who regard him merely as the best model of versification in the still living language of scholarship.⁽¹⁾ He must be understood rather as one who owed most to poets who wrote in a language other than his own, and as one whose poetic mantle had fallen not on the later Latin versifiers but on the poets of modern Italy. He must be read with reference to the Greeks on one hand and to Dante on the other.

It is important to notice therefore that in his letter to Buonmattai,⁽²⁾ Milton places Italian upon an equality with the classical languages. Italian is now an essential part of education, and will go far even to supply a deficiency

(1) Cf. Letter to Gill, May 26, 1628.

(2) September, 1638.

in Latin and Greek. To the years just preceding this letter must be assigned a very significant group of entries in the Commonplace Book from Dante, Prudentius, Boccaccio and, perhaps, Ariosto.⁽³⁾ The note from Prudentius was "obviously entered contemporaneously" with one from Dante⁽⁴⁾ on the same page, and the presence of Prudentius in this galley is of the utmost importance. Witness Professor Garrod's apology in his preface to The Oxford Book of Latin Verse. "The author whose exclusion I most regret is Prudentius. If any one asks me, Where is Merobaudes? where Sedulius? where Dracontius? I answer that they are where they have always been - out of account. Interesting, no doubt, in other ways, for the student of poetry they do not count. Prudentius counts. He has his place. But it is not in this Collection. It is among other memories, traditions, and aspirations, by the threshold of a world where Vergil takes solemn and fated leave of those whom he has guided and inspired:

Non aspettar mio dir più nè mio cenno."

To place Prudentius we have only to turn back to the lines

(3) See J. H. Hanford: The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies, Pub. Mod. Lang. Assoc., XXXVI, pp.263-64, 1921.

(4) Ibid, p.264, n.23.

No voice or hideous humm
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving,
which contain perhaps Milton's earliest reminiscence of his
work. Certainly we are here on the high road that leads
from Virgil to Dante.

And for Milton's interest in Greek there is
evidence enough. He purchased Aratus in 1631, Euripides
and Lycophron in 1634. Some of the notes in his Pindar
appear to belong to 1634,⁽⁵⁾ Also we find him experimenting
in Greek composition,⁽⁶⁾ not, presumably, because Greek had
now become a living language like Latin, but more probably
because both were dead and one might as well write in one
as in the other. It is perhaps significant that in Lycidas,
where Latin would have been quite in order, Milton prefers
to use English. This is the more noteworthy because it is
in this very poem that Milton approaches most nearly to him
whom he recognised as the supreme model of Latin poetry.⁽⁷⁾
Yet the Virgilianism of Lycidas does not prevent that poem
from owing a large debt to Dante also. We may note too
that Lycidas is - as the Gallus is not - a pastoral elegy:
even in the form which is so closely modelled on Virgil,

(5) Ibid, p.261.

(6) Psalm CXIV (1634) and, by 1645, Philosophus ad Regem
Quendam and In Effigiei eius Sculptorem.

(7) Letter to Gill, May 26, 1628.

Milton looks beyond Virgil to the Alexandrians.

It was thus, perhaps, during the period which he devoted almost entirely to study, that Milton escaped from the over-learnedness, the top-heavy erudition which was the besetting sin of his age. His reading was solid and serious, but side by side with his respect for knowledge there was always the desire for something "more simple, sensuous and passionate." The native woodnotes wild of poetry appealed to him not less than the learned sock. He would find perhaps more of these woodnotes in Greek and Italian literature than in that of Rome, although even there they were more thickly scattered than in the much larger corpus of Things Written in Latin.

The phrase "simple, sensuous and passionate" must, however, be understood in its proper sense. Milton's poetic passions were not likely to be aroused by a simplicity or sensuousness that was merely irresponsible. He would have agreed with Euripides in the Frogs that poets are to be esteemed not alone for their skill, but for their good counsel and because they make men better in cities. Under his conduct even Chaucer⁽⁸⁾ and Ariosto⁽⁹⁾ are made to play their part in the work of human advancement, and if the

(8) Of Reformation in England, P.W. II, 384,390,395-96.

(9) Ibid, P.W. II, 383.

Greeks attracted him it was not as "Pagans"⁽¹⁾ but essentially
as teachers.⁽²⁾ We see this especially in the years following
his return from Italy when he was much concerned with making
men better in cities. In the Areopagitica he hopes for a
form of governance like that of ancient Athens, and in the
Reason of Church Government he looks forward to the establish-
ment of tragic festivals after the Athenian model.

This desire for simplicity and sensuousness and,
at the same time, for high seriousness of intention is not
easy to satisfy, yet with Milton this combination was
essential. Others have played with notions of the Golden
Age and of the Music of the Spheres; but he simply could
not conceive of the creation otherwise than in terms of this
very simple and tangible symbol of a universal harmony. He
saw the earth

As she was by the sources of Time,
and he would deem

Of God, of the world, of the soul,
With a plainness as near,
As flashing as Moses felt.

Ultimately he was to seek inspiration from the very Muse
that had inspired Moses, but for the present all we have to

(1) See Murray's Rise of the Greek Epic (2nd. edn.), p.28.

(2) Cf. the attack made on them in Paradise Regained, IV,
353 ff.

note is his preference for those authors who tell of the early ages of the world. Ovid, of course, had written of those times, but Milton has now found other and graver masters also. And by reason of their more reverent treatment of the early myths, Milton was able to gain from them a simplicity and sensuousness which he could not have learned from Ovid.

The frolick Wind that breathes the Spring,
Zephir with Aurora playing,
As he met her once a Maying,
There on Beds of Violets blew,
And fresh-blown Roses washt in dew,
Fill'd her with thee a daughter fair,
So bucksom, blith, and debonair.

Whatever the spirit here unsphered, it certainly is not
(3)
the spirit of Ovid.

A better example is perhaps to be found in the
lines,

the Muses in a ring
Ay round about Joves Altar sing,

with their obvious recollection of Hesiod. We have only to remind ourselves for a moment of what Ovid could do with these same Muses. He could set them off by a tawdry and conventional background, presented in full detail:

siluarum lucos circumspicit antiquarum
antraque et innumeris distinctas floribus herbas. (4)

(3) "Nonne Platonem reviviscere dixeris." - Des Essarts, p.12.

(4) Metam. V, 265-66.

He could even go so far as to introduce the polluting presence of a Johnsonese schoolmistress, submitting his nymphs to the crowning indignity of her empty and civilised approval. She describes them as not less fortunate in their pursuits than in their situation. (5)

We must hesitate therefore before ascribing the freshness of Milton's poems wholly to Elizabethanism or to the air of Horton.

5.

Comus, like L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, owes something to the Elizabethans, but its chief debt is to the more serious studies which in those poems were only hinted at. (6) In Comus may be detected the approach to the essential Virgilianism for which the entries in the Commonplace Book had prepared us. (7) The form of the poem is indebted to the Greek tragedies which held the fancy of Il Penseroso. But the chief debt of all is to the philosophy which Il Penseroso is represented as reading.

(5) Felicesque uocat pariter studiosque locoque Mnemonides. Ibid, 267-68. J

(6) Spenser is here to be considered with Plato.

(7) Cf. e.g. Comus, 78, Aeneid VI, 129; Comus, 979, Aeneid VI, 887.

Milton's chief interest is obviously not in the working-out of the story which he borrowed from Peele. His brothers are quite useless. Their business is simply to fear lest their sister should be in danger and hope she is not in danger, to find how fine it is to be a philosopher, and to be taken with short fits of rhyming. "In all these parts," Johnson justly complains, "the language is poetical, and the sentiments are generous, but there is something wanting to allure attention." Johnson, of course, would not admit that any part of Comus could allure attention, but apparently it comes very near to doing so in "the dispute between the Lady and Comus" which, says he, "is the most animated and affecting scene of the drama." Yet it is precisely in this scene that the difference between Milton and Peele is most complete. The whole interest of the situation depends on two circumstances which are not to be found in the Old Wive's Tale: the Lady throughout retains the freedom of her mind, which the Enchanter has no power to touch; and the Enchanter himself does not seek merely to gain the Lady's affection, but aims at misleading her judgment so as to bring about her moral degradation.

Here then we have to deal with questions of a different kind from anything in Peele's dramatic fairy tale.

We have, in fact, the essentially Miltonic theme, the conflict of good and evil; and in the treatment of this theme stress is already laid on the freedom of the mind. If this conflict appears in a different form from that presented later in Paradise Lost, the reason is not to be sought in the influence of Peele, Jonson or Puteanus. The fact is that this was the form in which the young poet was then accustomed to set this question before himself. At the time when Comus was written, Milton found the fundamental principles of right living in certain "abstracted sublimities" concerning "chastity and love."

We have here to deal therefore with a poem of a different kind from L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. We have here to consider not passing fancies or chance phrases and situations which may or may not have lingered in the poet's memory; our concern is with ideas which had become the centre of his intellectual and moral being. In acknowledging vital debts of this sort, Milton, so long as the public would allow him to take it into his confidence, was the readiest of poets. In the present instance, at all events, there is no need to go beyond his own words:

"Thus, from the laureat fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy; but chiefly

to the divine volumes of Plato, and his equal Xenophon: where, if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love, I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy; (the rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion, which a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about;) and how the first and chiefest office of love begins and ends in the soul, producing those happy twins of her divine generation, knowledge and virtue."⁽⁸⁾

The recurrence of the theme of the "charming cup" and the "intoxicating potion" must not lead us however to seek a more direct connection between Plato and Comus. The earlier reference to Circe in Elegy VI suggests that the Platonism of Comus was not borrowed simply for the occasion. If Plato is to be considered a "source", he must be understood to be a source of a kind different from those, for example, of Shakespeare's plays. Whatever there is of Platonism in Comus is only there because it has come to be an essential part of Milton. He has acquired at least a sufficient proprietorship in it to modify it according to his circumstances.

It is true that Comus contains things which seem to be borrowed directly from the Phaedo. Such, for example, is the conception of mankind "confined and pestered in this pinfold here", or the contempt of the body in the exaltation of the soul (to which it serves as a sort of prison-house)

(9) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 119-21.

and the idea that the body may bring pollution to the soul. Yet, for all that, Comus is not a record of the immediate impression which Plato made on the mind of Milton. It is remarkable that it should refer to the Phaedo rather than to the Phaedrus or Symposium. This is not what we should expect from Milton's statement in the Apology for Smectymnuus. Comus, in fact, misrepresents Milton's Platonism. The alternative to the cup of Comus is not the more charming draft of true love but mere abstinence.

For this there are obvious reasons. It is difficult to conceive how the machinery of the two cups could be worked out in the plot of the drama. Yet the theme of unchastity could not be presented on the stage - by Milton at any rate - except by some such symbolism. Besides the general aversion of the Puritans from such subjects, there was a certain reverentia due to the youthful performers.⁽⁹⁾ Apart, however, from the general structure of the play, one might have expected some few echoes from the Phaedrus and Symposium to be scattered here and there. The absence of such reminiscences is perhaps important. Milton himself thought most highly of the "abstracted sublimities" of the love "whose charming cup is only

(9) Passages such as 679-81 and 737-55 were apparently not contained in the acted version of Comus.

virtue." But he was also aware that what in him proved so many incitements to the steadfast observation of virtue would to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living.

6.

When Comus was written the consideration of the steadfast observation of virtue and of the fuel of loose living had recently been thrust upon public opinion by the publication of Prynne's Histrionastix. It is not likely that Milton shared Prynne's views, though possibly Prynne directed his attention to the opinions of the Fathers upon dramatic spectacles.⁽¹⁾ He probably regretted Prynne's narrowness and defective sense of proportion. Yet he would be even more likely to be moved to anger by the brutality of the Star Chamber. He certainly would not have forgotten the events of 1628. It is, moreover, quite impossible to suppose that he in any way approved of the reckless extravagance of the masque which the four Inns of Court presented "as an expression of their love

(1) Commonplace Book, 241. The entry from Lactantius and the note of Milton's own disagreement are of later date. Cf. Hanford, *op.cit.*, p.264 (Cyprian, Tertullian), p.265, p.296.

and duty to their Majesties" or of that, scarcely less costly, given by their Majesties shortly afterwards in the Banqueting-House at Whitehall. (2) If distaste for Puritan bigotry had been even a minor motive in causing Milton to undertake the writing of a masque, it is remarkable that the poem itself contains not a single hint of this. It is not in Comus that Milton shows himself a friend to honest mirth and unreprieved pleasures free. The true answer to Prynne is not Comus but L'Allegro.

Yet there have been some who have read Comus (3) in this way, and some even who have regarded the enchanter himself as expressing Milton's own views. (4) Comus, indeed, very often reminds us of the poet of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. Such lines as:

Right against the Eastern gate,
Wher the great Sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveries dight,

or

(2) If every just man that now pines with want
Had but a moderate and befitting share
Of that which lewdly-pamper'd Luxury
Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
Natures full blessings would be well dispenc't
In unsuperfluous even proportion,
And she no whit encombred with her store. vv.768 ff.

(3) e.g. J.R.Green: Short History of the English People.

(4) Newbolt: A New Study of English Poetry, pp.204-05.

Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods, and Becks, and Wreathed Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport that wrincled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides,

are inevitably called to mind by Comus's

The Star that bids the Shepherd fold,
Now the top of Heav'n doth hold,
And the gilded Car of Day,
His glowing Axle doth allay
In the steep Atlantick stream,
And the slope Sun his upward beam
Shoots against the dusky Pole,
Pacing toward the other gole
Of his Chamber in the East.
Meanwhile welcom Joy, and Feast,
Mid night shout, and revelry,
Tipsie dance, and Jollity.
Braid your Locks with rosie Twine
Dropping odours, dropping Wine.
Rigor now is gon to bed,
And Advice with scrupulous head,
Strict Age, and sowre Severity,
With their grave Saws in slumber ly.

Yet there is a decided difference in tone, and
this difference is even more apparent when we find

But hail thou Goddess, sage and holy,
Hail divinest Melancholy,
Whose Saintly visage is too bright
To hit the Sense of human sight;
And therefore to our weaker view,
Ore laid with black staid Wisdoms hue,

converted into

Hail Goddess of Nocturnal sport
Dark vaild Cotytto.

It is hard to believe that Milton had deserted his Euphrosyne, daughter of Bacchus and Venus, (to give her the lowest possible parentage) for this son of Bacchus and "a certain sorceress the abuser of love's name."

It is hard to believe that at any time between the writing of the sixth elegy and the date of The Reason of Church Government and the Apology for Smectymnuus Milton himself held the views which he gathered from "libidinous poetasters" (5) to put into the mouth of Comus.

Yet the poetry of Comus, it is alleged, is nearly all on the enchanter's side. That represents exactly the position as it appeared in 1634. Not all men knew the true Euphrosyne, but all were being urged to take sides. People like Prynne would deny all forms of enjoyment, while the less responsible members of the Court party were ready to accept as cultured and enlightened anything which served to outrage the moral feelings of the severer Puritans. In private life a man may be neither completely Liberal nor absolutely Tory; and he may find it possible to justify his position to himself and even to his friends. But if he would make his voice heard in times of exceptional

(5) "Every argument for indulgence urged by Comus may be found in the loose verses of the period." Masterman: Age of Milton, p.20. See this matter further discussed in Part II, Chapter V.

crisis, he must not try to muster a party of sensible men like himself. His only course is to recommend to the public what he considers the less damaging of the alternatives placed before them. In this dispute between the Puritans and the Court, there is no doubt which party Milton supports. The Lady speaks with the authentic tones of the "Lady of Christ's" in the Latin Prolusiones.⁽⁶⁾

Milton, however, misjudged the Cavaliers. The best of them were not less interested in matters of religion and morality than were the other party, though they might express their opinions less violently and with a keener sense of the complexity of human nature. But with the noblest elements of the Cavalier spirit, Milton had as little sympathy as with its lowest. He himself had been brought up in another school, and had acquired an excessive belief in the compelling power of brute assertion. The Lady in Comus suffers from this tendency, and her utterances might be found fairly satisfactory by Milton's more Puritanical friends. But she would probably be poetical enough to displease them - they were more accustomed to such things in prose. They alone would appreciate Milton's warning against the perversion of poetry, but it was hardly necessary to

(6) She even reminds us of God in Paradise Lost, and of Christ in Paradise Regained.

warn them since they probably suspected all poetry and perhaps doubted Milton's own wisdom in dealing with such matters in poetical form. The Cavaliers, on the other hand, could hardly be expected to recognise in themselves the wickedness imputed to Comus. There was apparently nothing in the Lady's doctrine which they did not accept in idea, though they may have regarded Milton's insistence as rather priggish. It was an admirable ideal, but not a new one. What was fresh was the poetry.

Thus Comus was admired by the wrong people. By admiring it they demonstrated their unfitness to hear themselves convinced. The Masque was received with enthusiasm and Lawes, who seems to have assumed a sort of proprietorship in it, tired his pen with the often copying of it for the satisfaction of his several friends. In his opinion it was a "lovely" and "legitimate offspring" of its author's genius - an opinion which, apparently, the author did not share. Even when Lawes had prevailed upon him to permit its publication, Milton - so little did he care to be identified with the masque-mania of the time - still refused to acknowledge it, but contented himself with adding a motto on the title-page:

Eheu quid volui misero mihi! floribus austrum
Perditus -

If Lawes' letter is to be believed, the blasts he apprehended were not those of adverse criticism. He had more to fear from indiscriminate admiration.

How well founded those fears were is shown by the sequel. Not long after the publication, it appears that Milton was led to admit to Sir Henry Wotton that he had written a masque. Afterwards he sent Wotton a copy. Wotton, as it turned out, had already seen it "som good while before, with singular delight" without, of course, knowing the author. Like Lawes, he is surprised at Milton's modesty, and his praise of the poem is ecstatic. He has seen nothing like it in English. Wotton's opinion was worth having and Milton was gratified by it. Nevertheless we suspect that even he had

nor Eare, nor Soul to apprehend
The sublime notion, and high mystery
That must be utter'd to unfold the sage
And serious doctrine of Virginitie,

for though he commends the tragical part in which this sage and serious doctrine is set forth, it is "the Lyrical" that ravishes him. "A certain Dorique delicacy" is, in truth, to be found in the Lady's Echo song and the Spirit's song to Sabrina, but ipsa mollities is not the commendation which Milton would desire for his poem. It suggests the witcheries of Dame Memory's siren daughters or of the other sirens with

whom Comus's mother was associated, rather than a more home-felt certainty of waking bliss. The ideal which Milton had in mind was more hard-wearing. It was a wayfaring virtue which might

trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,
Infamous Hills, and sandy perilous wildes.

Ipsa mollities was rather the virtue which Comus himself might claim:

See here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthfull thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in Primrose-season.

It is hard for a young poet to be praised by a critic he respects for what he conceives to be the wrong reason. When Comus was reprinted in the Poems of 1645, Wotton's letter was prefixed. In the face of such a testimonial, Milton's original motto would have appeared a very affected piece of modesty. Accordingly, his new volume has a new motto which must be read with its context to be rightly understood, since Milton has suppressed the four words which give the key to his intent:

si ultra placitum laudarit, baccare frontem
. cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro.

If it be objected that this is prefixed to the whole volume and not merely to Comus itself, the reply must be that the publisher had done his best to transfer Wotton's praise to

- x There is an interesting passage in the second of Harvey's letters to Shenser, wherein Shenser's "Dreames" are compared (among others) to Petrarch, and Saint John's Revelation is cited as the greatest achievement in this kind.

the whole volume. To be effective Milton's motto must come before The Stationer to the Reader.

7.

At the time of this Platonic enthusiasm Milton's favourite poets were Petrarch and Dante. It does not appear that Petrarch was responsible for any profound or decisive change in Milton's poetic constitution. His was not a strong and forceful personality like Dante's which challenges a reader to consider his own position from the outset. Petrarch's milder spirit seems to have helped Milton rather by quiet suggestion, by imperceptibly smoothing out his passage before him. He is the great reconciler. Thus while his muse professes a very Platonic conception of love and a proper regard for divine philosophy, it is yet capable of indulging in wanton bouts with a very Ovidian Cupid much in the manner of Milton's Latin elegies. (7) Petrarch no doubt served as the link between the Roman elegists and Dante. Without him it is difficult to see how Milton could thus group together poets so essentially

(7) Petrarch is also a link in another chain. His Trionfi begin with the triumph of Ovidian Love and lead by stages to the triumph of Eternity.*

different. With him the chain is complete, with Ovid at one end and Dante at the other. The Amores and the Vita Nuova are works of the same class, distinguished merely by the loftier moral tone of the latter.

This was not a mere defect in judgment but a necessary consequence of Milton's own character. His was a mind which developed by continuous and uninterrupted growth. His personality was not of the type which changes by violent conversion and by complete renunciation of its former self. Had it been so, he might have been more sweetly reasonable, more ready to believe it possible that even he sometimes might be wrong. But he would not thus have preserved that absolute self-reliance which is his distinguishing characteristic and which alone made Paradise Lost possible. When Milton enumerates the authors he has successively admired, these do not represent so many conflicting points of view each of which had mastered him for a time, only to be violently overthrown when he succumbed to the influence of the next. Milton read not so much for what his authors had to teach him as for what he chose to learn from them. He found the elegiac poets agreeable to nature's part in him, yet at the same time a certain niceness of nature kept him from low descents of mind. Even in his early poems

he was no more Ovidian than was consistent with his being Miltonic, and soon by the firm settling of his persuasions he became convinced that it would be better to leave the Ovidian manner alone. In the same way he insists that it was not only the course of his reading but his own riper years also which led him to the study of philosophy. The reason that he studied Plato was that Plato contained the kind of doctrine he was already looking for.

This is the impression one forms from Milton's words in the Apology for Smectymnuus. It is true that the lines appended to the seventh Latin elegy give a different version. There the passage from elegy to philosophy is represented as a definite breaking away from his former ways. There is no suggestion of a gradual transition and no mention of Petrarch. Yet in fact these lines are a striking illustration of Petrarch's accommodating influence. For Petrarch also had written amorous poems which he afterwards regretted or professed to regret. Instead of destroying them, however, he was content to publish them with an apologetic introductory sonnet. To this sonnet Milton's lines bear a marked resemblance. Now Petrarch might have found it difficult to suppress the offending poems, but Milton could easily

have done so. His choosing to preserve them must therefore count most strongly against the violence of his alleged conversion. Even more telling in this connection is the fact that in order to give point to these lines he has to rearrange the elegies which precede them, placing the most Ovidian of them first and last in the series so as to call attention to their objectionable qualities.

This then being the general manner of Petrarch's influence, we shall not expect to find in Comus any reminiscences so striking as to suggest that the poem was inspired by Petrarch nor such a collection of similarities as would indicate that Milton had studied Petrarch especially for the occasion. Yet the consideration of Petrarch's influence in Comus is more suggestive in the history of Milton's poetic character than that of any "source" is likely to be. In Petrarch's seventh sonnet, for example, we find the condemnation of luxury and intemperance and the praise of divine philosophy which are at the very centre of Comus. More important, however, than the sonnets in this connection are the Trionfi. The triumph of Chastity over the reign of Ovidian Love corresponds with a definite change in Milton's own history. Since one of the court masques of 1634(8) had presented the triumph of love almost as Petrarch

(8) Carew's Coelum Britannicum.

conceived it -

ad un giogo, ed in un tempo quivi
Domita l'alterezza degli Dei,
E degli uomini - (9)

it was perhaps with some thought of Petrarch in mind that Milton engaged himself to set forth the triumph of chastity. The virtù of the Trionfo della Castità shows the same (1) concern for her servants as Milton's Virtue. She that has that, in Petrarch as in Milton, is armed no less than (2) with complete steel. Therefore Milton's rejection of the sentiment in Petrarch's lines:

Passamo al tempio poi di Pudicizia;
Ch' accende in cor gentil oneste voglie,
Non di gente plebea, ma di patrizia, (3)

may be taken as some indication of his attitude towards the court revels of the time.

But the most striking reminiscences of Petrarch to be found in Comus are not taken from the Trionfi. The phrase "the sun-clad power of Chastity," for example, is obviously a recollection of the opening lines of the canzone

(9) Trionfo della Castità, 1 ff.

(1) Ibid, 46 ff. Cf. Comus, 9, 373, 589, 1019.

(2) Trionfo della Castità, 76 ff. Cf. T. della Morte, 7.

(3) Ibid. 181 ff. Cf. Comus, 321 ff.

(4)

Vergine bella, che di Sol vestita.

So also the lines on Virtue -

She can teach ye how to clime
Higher than the Spheary chime -

owe comething to the canzone,

Gentil mia Donna, i veggio
Nel mover de' vostr' occhi un dolce lume,
Che mi mostra la via, ch' al ciel conduce.

Yet it is to be noted that though Milton admits the power of the dolce lume, he does not think fit to tell us that ladies' eyes are the true Promethean fire whence this salutary influence is derived. Again, when we are assured that Philosophy is

Not harsh, and crabbed as dull fools suppose
but, in fact,

a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
we are put in mind of the sonnet

Pasco la mente d' un sì nobil cibo,
Ch' ambrosia e nettar non invidio a Giove,

in which Petrarch's interest is philosophical inasmuch as he learns thereby

quanto in questa vita
Arte, ingegno, e natura, e'l ciel può fare.

But these more than nectared sweets are gained by seeing his lady and hearing her voice, though Milton does not

(4) See however Trionfo della Morte, 25. But this canzone (56 ff.) is again echoed in Comus, 461.

suggest any such pleasant means of attaining the required end. So, therefore, whilst it is possible that Petrarch helped to form some of the conceptions set forth in Comus, it is obvious that Milton has seen to it that he should be fittingly bowdlerised to suit the occasion. The audience for whom Comus was intended were not likely to have been initiated into these "abstracted sublimities".

We must not assume, however, that this bowdlerisation of Petrarch was altogether due to the audience. Milton rightly credited Petrarch with a very noble ideal, but there is little to show that he fully comprehended Petrarch's intentions. His preference of Petrarch and Dante to other poets of love was justified merely on the grounds that they were more moral than some others. (5) He does not, however, seem really to have entered into the spirit of their poetry. (6) If he applied seriously the suggestions of the Convivio in his reading of Petrarch and Dante, he would perhaps suspect a strong philosophical purpose in poems apparently purely amorous. If so, he would certainly feel that the style of these poems was somewhat injudicious. (7) In any

(5) Cf. C.H.Herford: Dante and Milton (Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, vol.VIII, 1924), p.200.

(6) of which Milton is known to have possessed a copy.

(7) Dante indeed practically makes this an excuse for writing the Convivio. (I, ii, 117-123).

case we must remember that even on Chastity and Love the final authority must ever be not Petrarch and Dante but the Bible. The comments of the Apology for Smectymnuus upon the words of St. Paul seem to imply that Milton's conception of Chastity must have been applicable to the married state.⁽⁸⁾ And since chastity was immediately necessary for man who is both the image and glory of God, and only mediately necessary for woman as the glory of man, he would not appreciate the real significance of Laura and Beatrice.⁽⁹⁾ It is especially unlikely that he ever really appreciated the Vita Nuova, since he disliked scholastic modes of thought not less than monastic conceptions of virtue. Poetry ought to be more simple, sensuous and passionate than logic. Obviously therefore it is not here that the influence of Dante is to be sought.

Yet that influence is apparent nevertheless, and obtrudes itself in a manner wholly different from

(8) P.W. III, 122. Even the Married Love of Paradise Lost is not without its abstracted sublimities. Cf. e.g. VIII, 589 ff.; IX, 235 ff.

(9) The mention of the romances (and especially of their solemn cantos) is also important. The model of the chastity presented in Comus is not Laura nor Beatrice.

(1)

Petrarch's. Dante, like the Milton of Paradise Lost, must move what he touches. What particularly distinguishes him is the extraordinary completeness and force of his personality and his close and active interest in all the affairs of his time. He directs his speech to "states and governors" and that, not "with fear of what will be the censure", but with decided confidence in what he has to say. He has the dignity and the sublime self-complacence of a Hebrew prophet. Sometimes indeed he will display other, and less admirable qualities of the prophets - qualities for which Milton himself has more often, though with less justice, been blamed. Thus, in the manner of Samuel, he exhorts the emperor Henry to chastise Florence:

(1) The more pervasive influence of Petrarch still persists in Lycidas and even later still. In Lycidas we may detect some recollection of the Trionfi which had considered the topics of death and earthly fame and eternity which was to be the great reward and final compensation. In the Prose Works there are the references in the Apology for Smectymnuus and the Letter to Buonmattai (P.W.III, 117, 124, 497). More important are the reference to Petrarch's 108th (really 107th) sonnet in Of Reformation in England (P.W. II, 383) and the recollection thereof in the sonnet "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd Saints." Other sonnets of Milton may owe something to Petrarch. Those to Cromwell and Fairfax are in the spirit of Petrarch's 23rd. sonnet, though they form a strong contrast with the 82nd. Petrarch's sonnet to Colonna (X) is not unlike the Horatian invitations to Lawrence and Skinner, and that to Malatesta (LXXXIII) celebrates one, like Vane, "young in years, but in sage counsel old." The fifteenth and sixteenth sonnets in Petrarch's second part (CCXLII-CCXLIII) have some resemblance to "Methought I saw my late espoused Saint."

Nam et tu in regem sacratus es, ut Amalech percutias et
Agag non parcas; atque ulciscaris illum qui misit te, de
gente brutali et de festina sua sollemnitate. (2)

The concluding passage of the letter from which this is taken is very interesting.

"Dost thou not know, most excellent of princes, and from the watch tower of highest exaltation dost thou not perceive where the fox of this stench skulks in safety from the hunters? For the culprit drinketh not of the headlong Po, nor of thy Tiber, but her jaws do ever pollute the streams of the torrent of Arno; and (knowest thou not perchance?) this dire plague is named Florence. She is the viper that turns upon the entrails of her mother. She is the sick sheep that infects the flock of her lord with her contagion. She is the foul and impious Myrrha that burns for the embraces of her father Cinyras. She is that passionate Amata who rejected the wedlock decreed by fate, and feared not to summon to herself the son-in-law that fate denied her; who called him forth to war, in her madness, and at last, expiating her evil deeds, hanged herself in the noose. In truth, with the fierceness of a viper she is striving to rend her mother, for she hath sharpened the horns of rebellion against Rome, who created her in her image and after her likeness. In truth doth she breathe out poisonous fumes, exhaling infection whence the neighbouring sheep pine even without knowing it, whilst she with her false blandishments and fictions draweth her neighbours to her and bewitcheth them when drawn. In truth doth she burn for the embraces of her father, since she striveth, in wicked wantonness, to violate against thee the assent of the supreme pontiff, who is the father of fathers. In truth doth she resist the ordinance of God, worshipping the idol of her proper will; and whilst scorning her rightful king, she blusheth not, in her madness, to

(2) Epistola VII, 107 ff. Oxford edition.

traffic in laws which are not hers, with a king who is not her own, for power that she may use amiss. But the infuriated woman doth but await the halter wherewith to noose herself. For often is one betrayed into reprobate conceit, that when betrayed he may do the things which beseem him not. Then, though they be unjust deeds, yet are they recognised as just penalties.

Come, then, banish delay! thou lofty scion of Jesse. Take to thee confidence from the eyes of the Lord God of Sabaoth, before whom thou standest, and lay this Goliath low with the sling of thy wisdom and the stone of thy strength; for when he falleth, night and the darkness of fear shall overwhelm the camp of the Philistines; the Philistines shall flee, and Israel shall be delivered. Then shall our heritage, the taking away of which we weep without ceasing, be restored to us again. And even as now we groan, remembering the holy Jerusalem, exiles in Babylon, so, then, citizens, breathing again in peace, we shall look back in our joy upon the miseries of confusion." (3)

The English reader has not been taught to regard such things as essential to his knowledge of Dante, and, of course, there is no great political end to be gained by persuading English people that, in some unaccountable fashion, the greatness of the Florentine poet is impaired by the virulence of his Latin prose. Yet it is well to remind ourselves that these things are, lest when we meet something similar in Milton himself we should fall into the popular error of supposing that these horrible imaginings and this jargon of Philistines and Israel, Babylon and

(3) trans. Wicksteed (Temple edition).

Jerusalem were peculiar to Milton and the Puritanism of the seventeenth century.

Can we suppose that this aspect of Dante was unknown to Milton at this time, or, being knowⁿ, that it awakened no sympathetic response? We may at least remark that it is not as the singer of Beatrice that Dante appears in the Commonplace Book. The only canzone referred to is that which begins significantly:

Le dolci rime d'amor, ch'io solia
Cercar ne'miei pensieri,
Convien ch'io lasci.

Another entry, on the subject of the royal power, is from the prose De Monarchia. Even the notes on the Commedia are concerned mainly with such matters as the avarice of the clergy, the education of children, and the relations between Church and State. Which suggests that Milton was not unaware of Dante's concern with certain topics which for a time claimed no small portion of his own attention. We find him, moreover, quoting Dante in the (4) earliest of his anti-prelatic treatises.

These considerations, however, would be little to our present purpose, were it not for the lines in Lycidas in which this influence is already seen.

(4) Of Reformation in England, P.W. II, 383.

Last came, and last did go,
 The Pilot of the Galilean lake,
 Two massy Keyes he bore of metals twain,
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)
 He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,
 How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
 Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
 Of other care they little reck'ning make,
 Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
 Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold
 A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
 That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
 And when they list, their lean and fleshy songs
 Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,
 The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
 Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
 Daily devours space, and nothing sed,
 But that two-handed engine at the door, (5)
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

It is obvious that this passage is reminiscent
 of the twenty-seventh canto of the Paradiso. But this
 does not indicate merely a change of model. When Milton
 proceeds:

Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
 That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,

we cannot believe that he thought the example of Dante so
 overwhelmingly great by comparison that the light of Virgil
 should pale before it. (6) Rather we must suppose that he

(5) Paget Toynbee: Dante in English Literature, 1909, vol.1
 pp.119 ff. finds in this passage reminiscences of Inf.
 XXVII, 103-4; Purg. IX, 117-118; Par. XXVII, 49; Par.
 XXIX, 106-7; Epistle VII, 144-6 (quoted above); Par.
 XXVII, 55-6 and 119 ff.

felt that he had been betrayed into an expression of personal convictions too vital to be fitly embodied in a conventional literary exercise, however excellent the model. That these lines are the expression of intense personal feeling is beyond a doubt. And if the influence of Dante makes itself apparent at such a time, we may suspect that Dante has exercised a potent influence in the formation of these convictions. He is, that is to say, something more than a mere source - a model chosen for the occasion. In fact, what stamps this passage as Dantesque is not so much what it actually borrows from Dante as the Dantesque spirit which inspires it. Whether, in what concerns the power of the keys, Milton is "for once" demonstrably superior in thought to Dante is a question (7) which must be left to the special competence of Ruskin. Ordinary people will find it much easier to appreciate the striking difference between the lines with which Dante closes his denunciation:

Note (6) on p.147.

As if to guard against such a misconception, Milton reinvokes his muse not by the title 'Arethusa' of the Gallus - as he had after the speech of Phoebus - but by the formula of the Pollio: Sicelides Musae.

(7) Sesame and Lilies.

Ma l' alta provvidenza, che con Scipio
difese a Roma la gloria del mondo,
soccorrà tosto, sì com' io concipio,

and the corresponding verses of Milton:

But that two-handed engine at the door,
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

On the one hand, we have a vagueness which - as Ruskin remarked in another place - is "not the sign of imagination, but of its absence."⁽⁸⁾ And over against this there is, not mere accumulation of detail, but the direct communication of a ruthless and inevitable certainty of personal knowledge by means of a precise, though inexplicable, symbol. In this place Milton's utterance is for once more Dantesque than Dante's own.

This passage in Lycidas is the only outburst of its kind in the works of this period. Yet it alone is enough to destroy the baseless fabric of Mark Pattison's Palace of Art. It needs but one such blast of Astolpho's horn to liberate the youthful warrior from the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces and all the insubstantial pageantry by which the fond care of a learned sponsor would detain him, far from the unenchanted regions where the true wayfaring Christians are striving not without dust and heat.

(8) Modern Painters, III, iv, 14, gg. 29-30.

None of the poems written at Horton corresponds to the Nativity Ode of the earlier period. None of them, that is to say, is an attempt to handle a subject sufficiently important on a scale sufficiently grand to satisfy Milton's aspirations. In tracing the development of his purpose during this period, we are forced to rely on hints afforded by two poems which, in general scope and intention, are simply literary exercises in conventional forms. Of the two Comus is the more interesting, for, although Lycidas contains hints of future developments, these serve to connect it with the immediate and practical interests of the period next following rather than to foreshadow the author's future progress in his art.

Comus is Milton's first experiment in the narrative or dramatic kind of poetry, the first poem in which he has to deal with plot and character. It is natural therefore to expect in it some indication of his later method of treatment. The main theme, we have said, is the essentially Miltonic temptation motive, and it is here presented in a way which already looks forward to the ninth book of Paradise Lost. Here, as there, the person

tempted is a lady whom the tempter has the good fortune to find alone, separated from her male escort. In both poems the action opens with a prologue spoken by a supernatural actor: in Comus by the guardian spirit, and in Paradise
(1)
Lost by the tempter. After this comes a series of scenes which, with some modification and one change in order, is found in both poems. In Comus there is first a scene in a wood between the tempter and the lady, in which the tempter is struck stupidly good, and then on a false pretext leads the lady away. Next the two brothers enter and discuss whether the lady's virtue will of itself be sufficient to protect her without their aid. In the next scene the lady, having been led to a place "set out with all manner of deliciousness," undergoes her temptation, and after her triumph her escort arrives.

In Paradise Lost there is only one male protector, so that the discussion in this second scene cannot be given quite in the same form. Moreover the story has to be connected up with a whole series of preceding events; which means that the incident of the lady's separating from her escort must actually be presented, not merely postulated. The discussion is therefore brought forward to the first

(1) IX, 99 ff.

scene, where the opposing views of the two brothers are urged by Eve and Adam respectively as arguments for and against their separation. In the scene of the first meeting of the lady and the disguised tempter - now the second scene - the tempter is assailed by the same stupid goodness and the difference in the social standing of the two parties is insisted on much as in Comus. Eve, like the Lady, is aware of the unusualness, not to say the impropriety, of taking such a guide, but with the same patronising graciousness she allows herself to follow. And so to her temptation and fall, and the subsequent arrival of Adam.

But it is not only in its dramatic economy that Comus resembles Paradise Lost. Although the earlier temptation is not the great historical event on which the whole destiny of earth depended, it is yet treated with equal seriousness - and, moreover, with the same kind of seriousness. One can sympathise with those readers who regard with distrust any poet suspected of didactic intentions. Too often however they fail to perceive the essential difference between the "high seriousness" which is as necessary to the greatest art as to true morality, and the facile tendency to trite moralising which is an

enemy to both. Had Milton's sorcerer been brought to strict poetic justice and the audience exhorted to

regard his fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,
Onely to wonder at vnlawful things,
Whose deepenesse doth intise such forward wits,
To practise more than heauenly power permits;

or if, neglecting to contrive so fine "a precedent to teach wicked men" what will happen "when they leave religion and turn atheists", he had contented himself with blandly pointing the moral,

When all things have their trial, you shall find
Nothing is constant but a virtuous mind;

then assuredly we should have cause to be aggrieved. But he is saved from such ineptitude not less by his profound moral sincerity than by his sense of artistic proportion. The cosmic forces of good and evil are not touched by Milton but to universal issues:

against the threats
Of malice or of sorcery, or that power
Which erring men call Chance, this I hold firm,
Vertue may be assail'd, but never hurt,
Surpriz'd by unjust force, but not enthrall'd,
Yea even that which mischief meant most harm,
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
But evil on it self shall back recoyl,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last
Gather'd like scum, and setl'd to it self
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed, and self-consum'd, if this fail,
The pillar'd firmament is rott'nness,
And earths base built on stubble.

Virtue is essential to preserve the universal harmony:

if Vertue feeble were,
Heav'n it self would stoop to her.

We have seen how, in Milton, a theme of great importance always demands a universal setting. We are not surprised, therefore, in this his first treatment of the theme he held most important of all, to find that the action is largely brought about by supernatural personages. The enchanter is not a mortal wizard but a being of godlike birth definitely leagued with the powers of hell. And to counteract his evil designs there is an emissary sent from

where those immortal shapes
Of bright æreal Spirits live inspear'd
In Regions milde of calm and serene Ayr,
Above the smoak and stirr of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth.

That Heaven is directly interested in the proceedings is indicated in several places. The Lady knows that her trial will last only "while Heaven sees good," ⁽²⁾ the Elder Brother relies on the special regard of Heaven in going ⁽³⁾ forth to her rescue, and in the end we learn that

Heav'n hath timely tri'd their youth

- a statement which apparently demands for its justification some such scene as the Prologue to Faust or that to the book

(2) 665-66.

(3) 658 in the original version of the Cambridge MS.

of Job, or perhaps something like the third book of Paradise Lost.

This, however, is impossible. In actual performance on the stage one can but hint at such things: all that can be shown is what takes place on earth. Yet we are never in danger of forgetting earth's insignificance in the universal system. It is but a mere pinfold in which the author is for the time being confined and pestered. In Henry V Shakespeare had doubted his own ability to present adequately the great spectacle of Agincourt within the limited space at his disposal:

Can this cockpit hold the vasty fields of France?
But the mere comprehending of two mighty monarchies within a wooden O was not likely to cause much uneasiness to Milton. To him the earth with all its monarchies was but a cockpit, and when he writes of

all the Sea-girt Iles
That like to rich, and various gemms inlay
The unadorned boosom of the Deep,
Which he to grace his tributary gods
By course commits to severall government,
And gives them leave to wear their Sapphire crowns,
And weild their little tridents,

the whole region 'twixt high and nether Jove is brought within the compass of a marionette show.

The earth, of course, is not quite so small in

perspective as when Uriel first indicates its position to Satan. In Comus we are not permitted to journey through space with the immortals. Milton realises that he cannot and must not allow his machining persons to seduce us into viewing the world so frequently from their own lofty standpoint. Yet it requires all his vigilance to keep them in their proper place. The "thousand liveried angels" who lackey chaste souls, being obviously impossible of presentation, were no doubt excluded without effort. But the single guardian spirit that does appear threatens to establish our point of observation on the high supra-mundane plane. He it is, in his opening speech, who teaches us that the earth is but a dim spot in the total system, and so great was Milton's sympathy with this point of view that he was led to expand his speech by the addition of eleven more verses. Then, perceiving whither he was tending, he hastened to correct himself:

But soft, I was not sent to court your wonder
With distant worlds, and strange removed climes.

Finally, however, he took the severer course of omitting the whole passage.

In the lines thus rejected it was explained that the Atlantic and the Stygian pool were both fed by the same ocean. The infernal regions were thereby brought into

fairly close connection with the "tract that fronts the falling sun" where Comus was performed. This no doubt was one reason for the omission. And we may assume that a similar motive caused the sun to alay his glowing axle

In the steep Atlantick stream,
instead of

In the steepe Tartarian streame,
as the original version had it. Despite his best efforts, however, Milton cannot keep hell quite outside the range of his dramatic interest. The darkness which appears in the forest is stated by Comus to be of Stygian origin, and at least one direct avenue of communication between earth and the lower world is left open by the Guardian Spirit. (4)

In dealing with heaven Milton has been more successful, but here again care was needed. When first the thousand liveried angels were mentioned, the possibility of their actual appearance was ruled out since they appear to mortals only

in cleer dream, and solemn vision.

But from this new quarter comes a temptation not less potent than that of the Spirit's prologue. For the Lady has just such a vision:

(4) 513 ff.

Thou flittering angel girt with golden wings,
And thou unspotted forme of chastity,
I see ye visibly, and while I see yee,
This dusky hollow is a paradise,
And heaven gates ore my head.

The thousand angels have not yet appeared, but already

Just o're the blissful seat of Paradise

the passage wide has opened so far as to admit a view of the
doors of bliss. The vision obviously is taking the same
shape as that of Jacob

(5)

Dreaming by night under the open Skie,

and we are almost prepared for the appearance of

Angels ascending and descending, bands
Of Guardians bright.

This assuredly would never do. In the final text the
references to paradise and to heaven gates are suppressed;
yet the angel is allowed. This is noteworthy since in
another place where heaven had been represented as directly
concerned in the action, we have an angel introduced instead. (6)
The word "cherub", however, twice used in the original
version, is carefully excised. (7) Perhaps it was too
definitely associated with the celestial hierarchy of the
prophets to be used in a poem where Milton consistently

(5) Paradise Lost III, 510 ff.

(6) 658.

(7) 219, 999.

avoids introducing the name of God. "Angel," on the other hand, should be capable of a wider significance. To a scholar, perhaps, it would not of necessity imply any more than is implied by the word "guardian", which in one instance replaces the offending "cherub."⁽⁸⁾

Besides these general similarities in form and spirit, Comus contains several hints of ideas which were to assume great importance in Paradise Lost. The Lady, for example, insists strongly on the freedom of the human mind and its power to resist temptation. The Elder Brother's assertion that "oft converse with heavenly habitants" can

cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the souls essence,
Till all be made immortal.

suggests already, not indeed the identity, but the continuity of body and soul. A later speech of the same brother also helps us to understand the Almighty's purpose in allowing Satan to follow out his schemes and the reason for the gradual deterioration of the arch-enemy:

Yea even that which mischief meant most harm,
Shall in the happy trial prove most glory.
But evil on it self shall back recoyl,
And mix no more with goodness, when at last,
Gather'd like scum, and setl'd to it self,
It shall be in eternal restless change
Self-fed, and self-consum'd.

(8) 219.

In these last two passages is indicated the function of good and evil in the world system: goodness making for true being and immortality by maintaining communion with heaven, and evil in its self-sufficiency making for non-existence. It is surprising, however, to find that the symbolism by which these ideas are expressed in Paradise Lost is already anticipated in Comus. Already the agent of evil has learned to look to the defeated Titans as his prototypes:

She fables not, I feel that I do fear
Her words set off by som superior power;
And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddring dew
Dips me all o're, as when the wrath of Jove
Speaks thunder, and the chains of Erebus
To som of Saturns crew.

And as the Titans are already the type of evil frustrated, so is the State of Innocence already presented under the figure of an Eden or of a Garden of Adonis:

Along the crisped shades and bowres
Revels the spruce and jocond Spring,
The Graces, and the rosie-boosom'd Howres,
Thither all their bounties bring.

The most noteworthy part of this description is to be found in the lines describing the

Beds of Hyacinth, and roses
Where young Adonis oft reposes,
Waxing well of his deep wound
In slumber soft, and on the ground
Sadly sits th' Assyrian Queen;
But far above in spangled sheen
Celestial Cupid her fam'd son advanc't,

Holds his dear Psyche sweet intranc't
After her wandring labours long,
Till free consent the gods among
Make her his eternal bride,
And from her fair unspotted side
Two blissful twins are to be born,
Youth and Joy.

Lines like these coming at the end of a poem which takes such pleasure in

Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence
are somewhat surprising. Herein we may find further cause for believing that the real chastity which Milton admired was not indeed the monastic virtue preached in Comus but the chastity of Amoret and of Britomart. The transition from the praise of chastity to the celebration of married love in Paradise Lost was not so violent as Comus might lead us to suppose.

Despite these points of resemblance, however, in one respect Comus falls immeasurably below Paradise Lost. In the presentation of character there can be no comparison between them. The actors in Comus are unreal and hypothetical. They do not live and cannot command our sympathy. Adam is dull and prosy but he is a living man, whereas the brothers are but rambling voices. The Lady indeed is admirable and well fitted for her part. In her special business of resisting temptation she seems to be highly skilled. If

she had failed, we should have been surprised. But we should not have been very deeply affected by the discovery that we had overestimated her technical competence. She herself does not interest us as does Eve. Nor indeed does Comus really interest us. If he impresses us, it is by his showmanship rather than by his personality. His wickedness is too pyrotechnic to command our respect. Of all the shallow optimisms there is none so pitiful as this childish belief in the brilliance of wrongdoing. Comus reminds us too much of the villains of Richardson. Though lively and impressive, he could only be imagined by a mind profoundly ignorant of life outside its own small sheltered sphere. Milton was not yet the creator of Satan.

9.

To descend from such high matters as these to mere questions of versification is in the nature of an anticlimax. But we must not forget that, at the time of his going to Horton, Milton had not yet discovered his true metre.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso in this as in other

respects lie somewhat apart from the main line of development. The octosyllabic couplet is not a suitable metre for the highest ranges of poetry. This sprightly measure is fatally easy to write: it says just a bit at a time. But it is very hard to make it say anything more than this bit. There is no room for the epithet which gives precision nor for the polysyllable which gives weight and variety of cadence. Usually the poet is content to get as near as he can in one couplet, and then add another to make his meaning somewhat clearer. And if that does not quite hit the mark, there is no reason why a third should not be added: the jaunty movement of the verse, unhampered by any weight of thought, carries one irresistibly along. Nor is this verbiage and tenuity of thought the only weakness of this measure. It is not only because of the greater concentration of meaning which it makes possible that the decasyllabic line has become the medium of our greatest poetry. This does indeed cause us to pay more attention to the words and less to the general movement of the verse. But the most important result to be gained from this closer attention is something more than an added preciseness of information: the words themselves, so they be written by the right man, can be made to yield a music of their own -

a rhythm which transcends the mere lilt of the verse beats.

The metre of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, then, is not one which we shall expect Milton to use in his greater poems. Yet these poems afford nevertheless interesting evidence of his increased skill in the art of verse. In them Milton avoids the dangers of the metre he has chosen, while he takes full advantage of its peculiar virtue. Here we find none of the wordiness which spoils the Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester: Milton no longer allows the jog-trot of the verse to run away with him. Yet when he chooses, he makes admirable use of its natural lilt to suggest the tip-toe trippings of Mirth and her companions. He is not always content, however, to move in this light fantastic manner. Often this staccato effect gives place to

notes, with many a winding bout
Of lincked sweetnes long drawn out,

as, for example, in such lines as:

And fresh-blown Roses washt in dew,
Through the Heav'ns wide pathles way,

or

Swinging slow with sullen roar.

In such lines the tone and colour of the words themselves completely overlays the mechanical pulsation of the metre.

Their rhythmic beauty is not to be accounted for by the accentual metric of a northerly nation. Whoever wishes to read blamelessly lines like these should see to it that his "speech be fashioned to a distinct and clear pronunciation" and that he open his mouth "wide enough to grace a southern tongue."

That the verbal rhythm should thus be made to predominate over such a pronounced metrical lilt as that of the octosyllable is sufficient testimony to Milton's skill. Only, as has been seen, he did not seek to do this always: for that would have robbed the metre of its easy grace and charm. In the decasyllable, however, except when its verse beat is reinforced by the constant
(9)
expectation of rhyme at regular intervals - as in the

(9) Dryden, of course, will write such lines as:

But when the chosen people grew more strong
The rightful cause at length became the wrong,
in which the lilt of the verse carries all before it and allows no vestige of rhythmic independence to the words employed. But Dryden's was a special art, and he understood it to perfection. It is to his amazing dexterity in fitting his words to the best of his verses that he owes much of his incomparable force and plausibility as a satirist. He meets the direct demands of his metre straightforwardly, without blandishments and without evasions: it all falls so pat that it cannot but be conclusive. When Oblivion comes tripping with such neatness and alacrity, what chance has wretched Nadab of averting his impending damnation? If the verbal harmonies of the passage had caused us to linger longer over the description of Shimei, we might have had leisure

heroic couplet and such compact stanza forms as the quatrain and the ottava rima - there is no need for such restraint. The verse of Lycidas, with its occasional short lines and its liberty of rhyming or not rhyming at will, has no trace of the obtrusive cadence of the fixed metrical pattern. There are snatches of terza rima and of ottava rima and couplets in plenty, but they are not repeated regularly enough for us to become familiar with them. The movement of Lycidas is fixed once for all by its opening lines:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

Those who come to the poem expecting to be carried along by the regular recurrence of like endings will be checked at once by the opening line which finds no answering chime until fifty-seven lines later. It is not until the fourth line is reached that we get a rhyme at all, and the rhythmical

Note (9) continued from p.165.

to remember that it was his Christian duty to love his neighbour as himself; and the more wicked the neighbour, the greater must be his own Christian charity. But all we have time to grasp is that Shimei had a preference for evil associates. It was not, however, in this spirit of alert virtuosity that Marlowe entertained divine Zenocrate or that Shakespeare gazed

In the dark backward and abysm of time.

effect of this consonance is neutralised by the fact that this line is of a different length from those which have preceded it. In Lycidas we are never tempted to tap off the verse beats on our fingers. We are content merely to read each word, allowing each syllable its proper value and never troubling whether it fits in properly or not. If the next line breaks off short, we are not tempted to tag it out to its full length as we are when we meet such lines in Dryden. We are not haunted by the subconscious sense of a prosodic pattern to which the words must respond.

In this rejection of mere lilt, Milton differed entirely from the songwriters of his time. There are, in poetry as in music, regions where even a hint of the trifling prettiness of song would be disastrous. Lear and Macbeth may be permitted to talk of buttons or of blankets at moments even of the highest poetic tension. But to sing of such things would plunge us immediately into the depths of Wordsworth's

tub like one of those
That women use to wash their clothes

or arouse memories of Lewis Carroll's

Shoes and ships and sealing-wax.

When Wordsworth tells us of the sensations sweet which the remembrance of the Wye valley had brought to him

in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities,

we are more deeply moved than we can be by his singing on a similar theme in the Reverie of Poor Susan. When really important questions are raised, the words employed must convey a sense of single-hearted sincerity, an impression not easily given if they are too obviously concerned in skipping about to the beat of a pre-ordained measure. The most we can allow to the Cavalier songsters, even though (which surely were praise enough) we admitted them to equal Milton's own Comus, would be that they

in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
And in sweet madnes rob'd it of it self.

Shakespeare, of course, understood this well enough. When he makes his Balthazar sing

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more,
this is all he intends. "Now is his soul ravished!" scoffs Benedick. "Is it not strange that sheeps' guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" But Milton's

Weep no more, woful Shepherds, weep no more
is different. What he seeks is a more sacred and homefelt delight, a sober certainty of waking bliss.

This is the true eloquence which does indeed charm the soul and is therefore superior to song which has power

only of the sense. In the poem which Milton wished to write, the appeal to the soul must predominate throughout. To do this means that he must rise above the manner not only of the Cavaliers and his own Comus but even of such a one as Spenser himself. Paradise Lost could not, like the Faerie Queene, move along on a general level of sensuous enjoyment rising to the loftier plane only at moments of special exaltation. Hence Milton's search for a metrical form which should adapt itself exactly to the requirements of this poetic eloquence, a covering which should fit the figure rather than a case into which the figure must at all costs be fitted. The interest throughout must be poetical rather than prosodic. The soul, as distinguished from the sense, takes cognisance not of the syllable, the line and the stanza, but of the word, the phrase and the paragraph.

Lycidas certainly comes very near to the fulfilment of this ideal. Some significance may perhaps also be found in the other experiments in the same kind of metre. On Time, for example, deals with matters of higher mood than the usual themes of the Horton poems, while Upon the Circumcision suggests that, emboldened by this new discovery, Milton has for once dared to return to the great subject of the Nativity Ode and The Passion. That he pursued it no further may be due to a revived distrust of the years

that he had, or it may also be due to his finding the subject itself no longer satisfactory. At all events At a Solemn Music takes us beyond the heights even of the Nativity Ode and suggests almost some of the empyrean flights of Paradise Lost.

The verse of Paradise Lost is not however that used in these poems; and since Milton had already written blank verse in Comus it may be asked why these other works should demand so much attention. To this the answer would be that the blank verse of Paradise Lost differs considerably from that of Comus, and that, in its general style and diction, it bears more likeness to the verse of Lycidas. The style of Comus is simpler and more colloquial, rather in the manner of the dramatists. It contains fewer inversions and betrays less of Milton's customary anxiety to obtain the fullest possible tone and word-colouring:

Com, no more,
This is meer moral babble, and direct
Against the canon laws of our foundation.

Dramatically admirable such lines may be, but they are no true example of Milton's normal manner.

(1)

The blank verse of the dramatists, we are told, is not to be considered in the same light as the purely

(1) See Bonamy Dobree: Histriophone.

literary forms of verse. Its business is to serve merely as an actor-proof medium, easy to learn and embodying the "natural breath unit of about ten syllables." Since Comus was written for actual presentation, not for reading, at a time when the Elizabethan drama still lived, we may suppose that it too was written "histriophonically". That, maybe, is why its verse as a whole lacks the deliberate harmony of the Dorian lay which succeeded it, that is why Wotton could discover "a certain Dorique delicacy" in its Songs and Odes but not in "the Tragical part," and that, finally, is perhaps one reason why Milton at first would not acknowledge the Masque as a "legitimate offspring."

This histriophonical way of writing was not Milton's natural manner and though, on the whole, he carries it off with success we can still distinguish here and there the larger utterance of the dedicated poet striving to make itself heard above the assumed tones of the playwright. We have seen how the uncontrolled worth of his pure cause carried him away, converting the darky vale into a paradise and bringing heaven gates within easy distance. Luckily he recollected himself in time to remove these things from his final version; but throughout he had to keep himself strongly in check. Had he once allowed his rapt spirits

to be kindled to their normal state of sacred vehemence

the brute Earth would lend her nerves, and shake - and the nerves of Earth, until the time of Mr. Hardy's Dynasts, have usually lain beyond the reach of dramatic art. Even The Dynasts, we remember, is not drama only but an epic drama. How much more suited these things are for epic may be judged from the effect of this passage on Comus, who is moved to express himself in the almost epic simile:

as when the wrath of Jove
Speaks thunder, and the chains of Erebus
To som of Saturns crew.

Never had any simile a more promising opening, but that unfortunately is all there is of it. Milton's lingering consciousness of dramatic propriety has reasserted itself, and by a foul and most unnatural mutilation this simile has been deprived of the tail which by right inalienable belonged to it.

It is in the prologue that we find the most striking evidence of the temptation which beset him. Perhaps Milton did not realise at the outset wherein his danger lay, or it may be that a prologue offered the greatest inducement to error. It may be spoken by an actor, but for all that it is not a strictly dramatic

utterance in character. Here more than anywhere else the author may gather his singing robes about him and speak most directly to his audience. If Milton had first adopted blank verse merely as the conventional actor-proof medium of drama - a useful makeshift but of no artistic importance - the writing of this prologue to Comus must have revealed to him what that metre might become when written by the hand of the author of At a Solemn Music. At all events, it is in the rejected version of that prologue that blank verse first learns to move

In perfect Phalanx to the Dorian mood,
and breathes that deliberate eloquence which raises mortal minds "to highth of noblest temper."

Before the starry threshold of Joyes Court
My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
Of bright æreal Spirits live inspheard
In Regions milde of calm and serene Ayr,
Amidst th' Hesperian gardens, on whose banks
Bedew'd with nectar and celestiall songs,
Eternall roses grow, and hyacinth,
And fruits of golden rind, on whose faire tree
The scalie-harnest dragon ever keeps
His uninchaned eye; around the verge
And sacred limits of this blissfull isle,
The jealous ocean, that old river, windes
His farre extended armes, till with steepe fall
Halfe his wast flood the wild Atlantique fills
And halfe the slow unfadom'd stygian poole.
But soft, I was not sent to court your wonder
With distant worlds, and strange removed climes.

Yet thence I come, and oft from thence behold,
Above the smoak and stirr of this dim spot,
Which men call Earth, and with low-thoughted care
Confin'd, and pester'd in this pin-fold here
Strive to keep up a frail, and Feaverish being
Unmindfull of the crown that Vertue gives
After this mortal change, to her true Servants
Among the enthron'd gods on Sainted seats.

10.

Milton's rejection of these lines and the care he must have exercised to avoid a recurrence of this high magnificent vein indicate sufficiently that Comus was not written up to the fullest extent of his powers. There were some things, most admirable in themselves, which were not suitable in a poem of this kind. This leads us to inquire what kind of poem Comus really is. We have spoken of it as though it were a play; but Johnson's criticism may remind us of the danger of regarding it too strictly in that light. And indeed Milton never intended it as a regular drama, but definitely entitled it A Masque.

If it were that, much of what we have already said would be woefully beside the mark. For masques are not merely dramatic, but aspire to epic heights. They are full of grand airs and heroic posturings. Their range is not confined to earth alone: often indeed their object is

to show that the Court at Whitehall is of the greatest importance not only here but throughout the whole solar system and beyond. To this end they introduce us to many mythological figures and often place their scene in ideal regions far away. When more familiar places are presented, they are always shown as strange countries newly discovered or visited by mythological personages who come hither to seek some small spot of earth made illustrious by royal greatness. The essential thing is that when a masque deals with persons or places actually present, it does so by relating them to a background of some poetic metaphysic adopted just for the occasion.

Something of this sort there certainly is in Comus, yet no more of it than might be allowed in a play. Shakespeare himself will sometimes present us with a fanciful metaphysic, in the Midsummer Night's Dream for instance where the destinies which govern the action are represented in visible shape by Oberon and Puck, or in The Tempest where Prospero and Ariel have the same function. The machining element in Comus, as represented by the Attendant Spirit, is less elaborate than either of these. Comus's rout of monsters, moreover, have no more resemblance to the usual anti-masque than have Bottom's company or

Caliban and his confederates. Then again, the interest in Comus is almost exclusively literary; there is little reliance on mere scenic effect. Even the machine by which Sabrina makes her entrance is to be paralleled in Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess rather than in any of the regular masques.

Milton then did not take advantage of the opportunities offered by the masque-form. This is surprising since a form which afforded such a universal range of presentation might seem admirably suited to the natural tendency of his genius. And there is reason to believe that his imagination had been stirred by some of the scenic effects in the masques he had witnessed. The descent of Peace in the Nativity Ode and the letting down of the "cloudy throne" in On the Death of a Fair Infant are probable reminiscences of such performances. But note the difference between them. In the earlier lines we have a reference to the actual machinery employed, whereas in the description of Peace we have a poetic interpretation of what on the stage must have been a somewhat cumbrous effect. It is remarkable that in Comus itself such descents are almost ignored. True it is that, in its present form, the poem opens with the direction "The attendant Spirit

descends or enters," but the choice offered indicates how little importance Milton attached to the matter. Indeed the Cambridge Manuscript mentions neither descending nor entering. The opening stage direction gives merely the name of the first speaker. It might seem that "descends" was added to meet the wishes of Lawes - who not only descended, but descended in great style with vocal accompaniment - and that Milton also put in the word "enters" to indicate his own sober preference.

Since the lines On the Death of a Fair Infant, Milton's ideas had changed somewhat. He had come to realise that there were heights of imagination to be reached not charioted by Inigo Jones and his very conspicuous mechanical devices, but on the viewless wings of Poesy. In a piece intended for stage performance, it was well therefore not to attempt such flights. Thus what he wrote in Comus was not a masque such as masques then were, but a masque such as John Milton thought stage masques ought to be.

And here it is important to note that while rejecting the methods of masque he still aspired to express something of the intention of the masque in another medium. The Nativity Ode itself is in fact Milton's own version of

The Triumph of Peace, and a comparison with Shirley's later work of that name will explain at once why Milton could not be satisfied with the ordinary masque and its painting and carpentry. In Shirley, Irene or Peace is made to descend on a cloud and is followed by Eunomia or Law and Diche or Justice. And indeed, if Jones could have accommodated a larger squadron of whitish clouds feigned of goldsmith's work, the author would probably have introduced other personages of the same sort. But Milton's greater theme raises him above mere questions of mechanical transport. The Peace that descends at the birth of Christ is too real and sacred to require any chariot of feigned goldsmith's work of man's providing. Nor can all Inigo Jones's wire-pulling avail to bring down Truth and Justice in her train. These things might be pretended at Whitehall to please a foolish monarch, but in reality they would never be until that day when the king of all kings

in middle Air shall spread his throne.

Since the time of the lines On the Death of a Fair Infant, as Mr. Bailey has pointed out, Milton has developed an "imaginative severity and high conception of poetry as a finer sort of truth than prose, not a more ingenious kind

of lying." Such a conception naturally involved quite a new point of view with regard to the kind of masques or disguises which this higher form of poetry might be permitted to celebrate.⁽¹⁾

The masque foreshadowed in the Nativity Ode was achieved in Paradise Lost. Adam and Eve are set in the same relationship to the supramundane powers as Charles and his queen had been in the court masques. Eden, like Whitehall, has become the effective centre of the universe. Moreover, if we set aside the interlude of the wars in heaven as a mere narrative put into the mouth of one of the characters, we shall find that there is very little action in Paradise Lost as compared with most other epics. It is made up in fact largely of dialogues joined by lengthy transformations or changes of scene, and this is the very essence of the masque. Considered from this angle even such an incident as the encounter between Gabriel and Satan is comprehensible. It provides at least a magnificent tableau and allows two very considerable characters to utter high and heroic language. To have resorted to actual violence would have been to destroy

(1) For this conception of the Nativity Ode see The Passion, especially lines 2, 19 and 22.

the high ceremonial atmosphere of the piece. Then the bridge-building of Sin and Death, what is it but a new and most astounding piece of machinery comparable with, although far surpassing, the descent of the three chariots at the end of Shirley's masque? So too, still comparing great things with small, the opening scenes in Hell might be likened to Jonson's antimasque of witches in The Masque of Queenes. In both the picture of the infernal regions is intended to emphasise by contrast the glory of the scene which follows.

It is easy to see therefore why the Milton of Paradise Lost poured such scorn on the masques at court.

Now came still Eevning on, and Twilight gray
Had in her sober Liverie all things clad;
Silence accompanied, for Beast and Bird,
They to thir grassy Couch, these to thir Nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful Nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung;
Silence was pleas'd: now glow'd the Firmament
With living Saphirs: Hesperus that led
The starrie Host, rode brightest, till the Moon
Rising in clouded Majestie, at length
Apparent Queen unvaild her peerless light,
And o're the dark her Silver Mantle threw.

How was the author of this to be satisfied with Inigo Jones's heaven "vaulted with blue silk and set with stars of silver, which had in them their several lights burning"? The resources of the masque-producer were not limited. "Oh, good Lord," wrote Sebastiano Serlio of the scenes made by

Jeronimo Genga for the Duke of Urbino, "what magnificence was there to be seene, for the great number of Trees and Fruits, with sundry Herbes and Flowres, all made of fine Silke of divers collors. The water courses being adorned with Frogs, Snailles, Tortuses, Toads, Adders, Snakes, and other beasts: Rootes of Corrale, mother of Pearle, and other shels layd and thrust through betweene the stones, with so many severall and faire things, that if I should declare them all, I should not have time inough."⁽²⁾ Yet one doubts whether even Genga could have done justice to Milton's Eden.

It seems almost as if Milton took pleasure in deliberately outdoing the slow-endeavouring art of the producer and his performers. Thus he compares Raphael to Mercury, who had been a favourite figure in the masques. Like Maia's son he stood, says Milton; but not like the Maia's son of the masques had he descended. The manoeuvrings of Raphael's flight, sailing now with steady wing between world and world, then with quick fan winnowing the buxom air, lay beyond the powers of any gymnastic artist. So too Pandaemonium which

Rose like an Exhalation.

(2) Quoted by Mr. Percy Simpson in Shakespeare's England, II, 330.

must make even the most skilful mechanical reproduction appear clumsy by comparison. Of another of his structures high Milton is careful to tell us that it is

inimitable on Earth
By Model, or by shading Pencil drawn,

and indeed in describing Pandaemonium itself he admits that his object is to humble the pride of those who boast in mortal things, by showing how the greatest monuments of human art and skill are easily outdone by spirits reprobate

and in an hour
What in an age they with incessant toyle
And hands innumerable scarce perform.

But if we would fully realise the inability of the methods of the masque to do justice to the height of Miltonic invention we must remind ourselves of such passages as that where Satan stands

above the circling Canopie
Of Nights extended shade

and then

windes with ease
Through the pure marble Air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable Starrs,

or of the seven continued nights he rode with darkness -

thrice the Equinoctial Line
He circl'd, four times cross'd the Carr of Night
From Pole to Pole, traversing each Colure -

or again of our meeting with him

Betwixt the Centaure and the Scorpion steering
His Zenith.

And then let us turn to the presentation of this same starry
universe in Carew's Coelum Britannicum:

"At this the scene changeth, and in the heaven is discovered a sphere, with stars placed in their several images, borne up by a huge naked figure (only a piece of drapery hanging over his thigh), kneeling and bowing forwards, as if the great weight lying on his shoulders oppressed him; upon his head a crown: by all which he might easily be known to be Atlas."

Such methods might suit Bully Bottom and his companions, and are no doubt good enough for those to whom the best in the poetic kind are but shadows and the worst no worse if imagination amend them. But Milton owed nothing to the light of princely favour and could count on no such gracious allowances. Nor had he the least intention of allowing anything of his to be amended by any audience. It must be his imagination and not theirs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ITALIAN JOURNEY.

Verum ego Italiam, non, ut tu putas, facinorosorum latibulum aut asylum, sed humanitatis potius, et civilium doctrinarum omnium hospitium, et noveram antea et expertus sum.

Second Defence.

Nullum unquam audivimus imperium, nullam civitatem, non mediocriter saltem floruisse quamdiu lingua sua gratia suusque cultus constitit.

Letter to Buonmattai.

1.

The period of apprenticeship at Horton could hardly add to the grandeur of Milton's poetic aims; yet there is at least no evidence that he suffered them even for a moment to suffer diminution. The most immediate result of the apprenticeship was the acquirement of a unique mastery of the art of verse. But though most of his exercises have been designedly limited in scope, something of Milton's method of handling his greatest themes has also begun to emerge. His competence in the various species of ornament is undoubted, and we see no

reason to doubt his skill - or rather his potential skill - in large design. What he lacks is the more prosaic and everyday knowledge of stresses and strains without which any attempt at building on a large scale is foredoomed to failure. Of human passions and of human life he knows but little.

But he was quite aware of this. Already in the letter to an unknown correspondent which accompanies the sonnet On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-Three he admits that for the time being he is giving up all the usual interests of his kind, forsaking "all the fond hopes that forward youth and vanitie are fledge with, together with gaine, pride, and ambition" for a "poor regardlesse and unprofitable sin of curiosity ... whereby a man cutts himself off from all action." But all this is done deliberately. His devotion to learning is not a "naturall pronenesse," for "there is against that a much more potent inclination inbred, which about this time of a man's life sollicit most, the desire of house and family of his owne, to which nothing is esteemed more helpful then the early entring into creditable employment, and nothing hindering then this affected solitari-nesse." For a time, then, he is willing to do some violence to his natural bent, but he has no wish to dream away his

years "in the armes of studious retirement, like Endymion with the moone, as the tale of Latmus goes." He may take no "thought of being late, so it give advantage to be more fit," but he does very truly intend to take his share of labour in the vineyard when his time shall come. By the year 1637 he evidently felt that the moment was at hand. It is then that in Lycidas we first find him making a pronouncement on the affairs of the time, and it is during the same year that he complains to Diodati of the obscurity and inconvenience of his present situation and announces his intention of taking chambers in one of the inns of court.⁽¹⁾

(1) Letter to Diodati, September 23, 1637. I am tempted to connect this letter with Ad Patrem, although that poem is usually assigned to an earlier date. It has been pointed out, however, that

Immortale melos, et innarrabile carmen (37)
either echoes, or is echoed by, "the unexpressive nuptial song" of Lycidas and that the line

Victrices hederas inter laurosque sedebo (102)
is repeated (with "sedebis" for "sedebo") in Mansus, 6. To this we may add:

(1) vv. 14-16 suggest that Milton has been some time at Horton and has passed many summer eves by haunted stream.

(2) vv. 86-92 indicate that he has enjoyed sufficient leisure to undertake a considerable portion of the studies suggested in the Vacation Exercise and the Prolusiones.

(3) v. 84 in particular is a fairly obvious reminiscence of some of the studies referred to in the letter to Diodati. (cf. Hanford: Chronology &c., pp. 262-63, 291).

(4) Romuleae (79) immediately suggests the Letter to Buonmattai, especially in its conjunction with linguae

We have already seen that his studies had not been guided by "the endless delight of speculation" or "the empty and fantastic chase of shadows and notions." His reading had been intended as a preparation for a practical life; nor had he made a sharp distinction between works of aesthetic value and those which were merely useful. Of sheer necessity, much of his most important reading was in Greek and Latin, but even here his interest was not merely academic. The ideas of the classics must be related to the real life of men on earth. It was the habit in some earlier ages and indeed among some of Milton's contemporaries to refer to classical authors as to repositories of ancient wisdom dictated by something more than human skill and in-

Note (1) continued from p.186.

and in the contrast implied between the classical language and that which has been degraded by barbarism. The reference to Italian may be hard to reconcile with the Buonmattai letter. Perhaps it is merely a poetic expression of what Milton took to be a philological truth. Possibly his father (it is noteworthy that he is addressed in Latin) had used some ^{such} phrase in discussing the projected Italian journey. Professor Hanford (Studies in Shakespeare, Milton and Donne, New York, 1925, pp.144 ff.) sees in these letters to Diodati evidence of a high Platonic cult of friendship. But they are also the expression of a simple desire to be understood. Hitherto Milton has offered excuse but not intimate explanation. When one's mother is alive one may obtain sufficient understanding without explaining. But when one's father demands explanations, it may be hopeless to expect any explanation to be received.

dependent of place or time. Milton's intention of visiting Rome and Athens shows his desire to establish a close connection between his classical studies and the real world in which he lived. Rome and Athens must be places that could be visited, not Utopias or Atlantises which could only be read about.

2.

It would have been strange, however, if in this last stage of his preparation for practical life Milton had shown so much interest in dead Greeks and Romans as to be unmindful of living Italians. But his letter to Buonmattai shows that this was not so. Not Athens was able so to confine him to the waves of Ilissus nor ancient Rome to the banks of Tiber as to prevent his visiting with delight the stream of Arno and the hills of Fiesole. Wishing as he did to popularise the best that was known and thought, to make classical ideas a vital influence in the life of his time rather than to add to the stores of mere scholarship, he could perceive the outstanding importance of Italian literature to the men of his age; and he commends it for much the same reasons as Matthew

Arnold afterwards commended French literature as an essential part of education particularly for those whose knowledge of the classical languages was but slight.⁽²⁾

This is a matter of some importance. For, it must be remembered, one of the chief effects of Milton's journey was to introduce him to men like Grotius and Holstein, luminaries of that world of cosmopolitan scholarship which at this time counted for much more with men of culture than any of the vernacular literatures. All our enthusiasm for Shakespeare and Spenser must not blind us to the fact that England, so far as she was then known to all, was known to European culture by the Latin works of such men as More and Bacon. If Arnold could be dissatisfied with the provincialism of English literature in his day, he had infinitely less cause than Milton. If it were possible for a poet as late as Gray to think of writing a great poem in Latin, there was very much more reason for doing so in the seventeenth century.

It would not be surprising therefore if, during his travels abroad, Milton had come to doubt the adequacy of his native English as a medium for the highest forms of literature. Yet, though it was by his Latin poems that

(2) Letter to Buonmattai, September 10, 1638.

he gained the admiration of his Italian friends, and though his English works would have been unintelligible to them, it was largely by Italian precept and example that he rejected the thought of aspiring to "second rank among the Latins" and resolved to "leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die." "For which cause," he continues, " ... I applied myself to that resolution, which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue."⁽³⁾ That he should thus adduce the example of Ariosto rather than that of earlier writers in English is significant. As the context shows, he believed that the choicest wits of Italy had already placed their native literature in a position of equality with that of Greece or of ancient Rome. Tasso, for example, is a model of excellence comparable with Virgil and Homer. It was to be Milton's task to raise the literature of England to an equal eminence.

Accordingly he regarded the cultivation of his native language in a spirit that was Italian rather than English. The idea of preserving the purity of the vulgar tongue by precepts and rules having the force almost of a

(3) Reason of Church Government, P.W.II, 478.

(4)
Romulean prohibition is more accordant with Florentine than with Elizabethan usage. The non si può of the Tuscan grammarians represents a point of view poles removed from that of the writers who could use any part of speech almost for any other and were so careless of syntax as to neglect even the concord of subject and verb. Yet Milton's aim was not quite the same as that of his friends, Buonmattai and Dati. Whether he himself knew it or not, his object was not so much to set up a standard of polite usage as to invent a suitable language for the composition of one particular poem. Undoubtedly there are many things that cannot fittingly be said in such a language as this. Such works as the Aeneid and the Divina Comedia^m are not written in the ordinary spoken dialect of their time and country, and he who aspires to the bello stile will need to sift very carefully the language spoken by the generality of his compatriots.

If we admit the poet's right to form, as it were, a language of his own, we cannot deny that some knowledge of the Tuscan methods would be useful to that end. To have, as Milton once had, no other guidance in English composition than could be gained from Latin alone might have been disastrous.

(4) Letter to Buonmattai.

Italian was at least a living language and the object of its legislators was to make it an adequate instrument for the expression of modern habits of thought. And although, as we have said, our own common tongue would not lightly conform to such regulation, we must remember that it was the common tongue which the Italians had in mind throughout. Their whole aim was to preserve the purity and intelligibility of their own language as the medium of intercourse of a whole nation, not merely to cultivate a certain artificiality of personal style. Their tendency was to check rather than to encourage any form of eccentricity.

The language of Paradise Lost is no more that of real men than is the language of the Faerie Queene. Yet none but Dr. Johnson will say of Milton what Ben Jonson said of Spenser, "He writ no language." Milton is on the whole more readily intelligible than his predecessor: we can more readily perceive the connection between his language and that of real men. (5) Though he rejects much he adds comparatively little; and all he does seems to be consistent, the outcome of some definite principle rather than of chance devices to meet the exigencies -

(5) Johnson protested against the Spenserian imitations in his century but not against the abuse of Miltonic diction. One could scarcely imagine Wordsworth using Spenserian language as he does that of Milton in The Prelude.

metrical or other - of the moment. He may be difficult and artificial but he never strikes us as being merely quaint and archaic. His language is not that of a man living in a world of his own. His Latinism may be objected to, but will not be severely censured by people sufficiently acquainted with the normal language of seventeenth century literature. These will recognise that this is at the worst but an exaggeration of a general tendency in the language of the time and that it is the more pardonable in one whose subject demanded that he should avoid the more familiar turns of expression.

3.

Milton's debt to the Italian critics is seen less in these matters of style and diction than in the larger questions of poetic form and intention. Already in The Passion the reference to Vida as the master of Christian epic serves to remind us that Milton's great ambition was more in accordance with Italian than with English literary ideals. In those early days Milton appears to have known Vida quite well and to have been much influenced by him. Not only does he know that a

great Christian epic is a thing very much worth doing, but he also knows, as Vida may have taught him, that it must be the fruit of long choosing and beginning late. Vida more than any other had insisted on the very careful training required by the poet and also on the need for the wholesale imitation and adaptation of classical models. The first of these doctrines became Milton's cardinal principle; the second he would seem to have fully realised in the very last poem which he wrote before setting out for Italy. Lycidas owes more to Virgil than any other of Milton's poems owes to any single author. And Virgil, as we know, was Vida's idol.

But what Milton could learn by reading at so great a distance was nothing compared with what he would learn in a cultured society in which literary principles were a continual topic of discussion. It is beside the point to insist that there was no outstanding genius in Italy at this time: genius is not communicable, and, if it were, he could have got all he wanted without straying from his native Bread Street. Nor need we too much lament that the great critics had also all passed away. The ideas of a great critic are valuable but they are reached by mental processes which are not those of the creative

artist. In direct conversation with a critic of real intellectual power, a young poet may be imposed upon by close-reasoning chains of thought of a kind not proper for him. Why should he be forced to take the false with the true, the trivial with the significant, merely because both form parts of a consistent logical whole? Critics, as Arnold maintained, can assist poets only at second hand, by putting ideas into common circulation and so creating a cultured public. To jealous professional eyes this public, bandying words not understood and phrases not its own, is contemptible enough. But in its superficial discussions any dictum of real importance will stand out sharply from the surrounding haze as a luminous suggestion, as an arresting flicker of inspiration, not as a menacing major premise ready to enfold the unwary within its syllogistic tentacles.

Such a public existed in Italy at this time. The critical problems of the former age were still discussed with lively interest, although little new ground had been broken. The example of Chiabrera may have given lyric poetry on the model of Pindar a place beside the epic and drama which had hitherto received almost exclusive attention, and the Gerusalemme Liberata - now become a classic - had begun to influence men's minds on matters relating to the

epic. Of Tasso we shall need to speak in a later chapter, but of Chiabrera we need make no further question since it is obvious that Milton's reference to "those magnificent odes and hymns, wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are in most things worthy" is added largely for the sake of completeness. His real difficulty was in choosing between the drama and the epic.

It was with these that Aristotle in the Poetics had been chiefly concerned and therefore it was to these that the early critics devoted most of their attention. Now Aristotle, though he had compared the two kinds, had not treated of epic in so much detail as he had treated of tragedy. Here then was a gap to be filled. But the critics who undertook the task were so much impressed by Aristotle's authority, that they could only work out their expanded theory of epic on the basis of hints which Aristotle had let fall. Minturno's definition of epic, for example, is merely a modification of Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Robortelli is able to effect a more radical differentiation by relying on Aristotle's remarks on the wider scope for the marvellous which the epic affords and by remembering his distinction between the imitation of what is and of what ought to be. Even Tasso, though he shows

more of independence, arrives at his theory of the function of epic by contrasting it with tragedy.

But it was not only in its relation to tragedy that the epic demanded attention. At the same time as these inquiries were going forward, another question inevitably arose. What was to be thought of such poems as the Orlando Furioso which obviously did not accord with the Aristotelian conception? Must all great narrative poems of necessity follow one model? Some critics were inclined to think so, but Cinthio, Castelvetro and others were prepared to allow heroic poems of several different kinds of which the classical epic might be one but not the only one.

Milton's thoughts had long been centred on the epic, but, before the Italian journey, there is nothing to show that he had considered it from either of these points of view. With the dramatists of his own country he had so little in common that we need not wonder that he never thought it worth while to set up their occasional successes on the buskined stage as supplying a possible alternative to the epic model. For the romances, on the other hand, he had professed a proper regard, but without

(6) Cf. Il Penseroso, 101.

expressing any desire to write such a poem himself. On his return from Italy, however, we find him considering both alternatives. He declares that he knows not whether to follow "that epic form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso, are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model" or to prefer "those dramatic constitutions wherein Sophocles and Euripides reign." And should he decide on the former kind, he still wonders whether "the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept" and even seriously begins to consider the essentially romantic subject of King Arthur.

Milton's knowledge of the Italian critics may fairly be assumed from his citation of Castelvetro, Tasso and Mazzoni in the Education tractate. Perhaps even his scholastic classification of poetry along with logic and rhetoric in the same work may be due to Italian influence. It is at least easier to find a similar method of approach in such men as Varchi and Robortelli than in Boileau and the later critics. Professor Saintsbury has also suggested that the phrase "the vain and amatorious poem," which Milton applies to the Arcadia, is probably an adaptation of Minturno's "amatorio mollique sermone effeminat." (7)

(7) Eikonoklastes, P.W. I, 327-²8. Saintsbury: History of Criticism, II, 54.

Since, therefore, he was so well acquainted with these writers, and since their writings formed by far the most considerable body of modern criticism, it is not unreasonable to expect that they helped to determine Milton's final choice of the epic form. This influence, of course, did not operate immediately. The works of the Italian critics were too considerable to be mastered at once, and Milton was more likely to take from them just what he wanted and just as he wanted it than to codify and accept their precepts en bloc.⁽⁸⁾

The stress which was laid by Robortelli and Tasso on the epic as the essential medium of the marvellous would of itself suggest that this was the natural medium

(8) From 1641 to 1644 he was still debating between epic and tragedy and probably taking counsel with the critics cited in Of Education. His successive reshapings of the draft scheme of Paradise Lost would convince him that he needed a form more spacious than the drama, but before he could conceive it as an epic he must attain a wider conception of epic than could be derived from Aristotle. He has not yet done so. The setting aside of the pastoral pipe and the proposed epic in the Epitaphium Damonis are mere Virgilianism. The heroical poem of King Alfred's reign suggested in the Cambridge MS. was to be an imitation of the Odyssey. The Reason of Church Government, however, already indicates the existence of disturbing influences, e.g. the desire to be a British Tasso, the insistence on "being a Christian," the doubts whether the laws of Aristotle are to be observed and the mention of Job. His position is not yet worked out, but in working it out he would derive much assistance from the Italian critics.

for the author of the Vacation Exercise. In the setting forth of the marvellous moreover the poet was to have the widest possible scope - a very necessary condition where Milton was concerned.

Il poema sovrano è una pittura
De l'universo,

says Muzio, while Castelvetro conceives of an epic setting raised to the heavens and lowered to the infernal regions. Indeed, quite apart from Milton's own requirements, there was an essential connection between the marvellous and this universality of setting. Tragedy, dealing with this imperfect world, could only move the immortal part of us by pity and terror. But epic, having power to deal with the whole scheme of things in the perfect world beyond, can move us by wonder.

But if this wonder is to be used to real and serious purpose, such as Aristotle claimed for the pity and terror of tragedy, it must be a real and serious wonder, not merely a willing suspension of disbelief. Tragedy will only move our pity and fear insofar as we recognise that the sufferings in it are possible to real people living on this real earth. So the wonders which are to exert any real influence on our souls must be such wonders as we can actually conceive as being possible in

the supernatural world. The use of the ancient pagan gods, therefore, was out of the question, and though Boileau's objections to Christian machinery are an effective reply to Minturno's original suggestion, they do not touch Tasso or Milton. The true epic poet, as Castelvetro taught, must fly into the heavens and search the heart of God, and these two, at any rate, had visitations of a kind unknown to Boileau. They were not "fabuleux chrétiens" who wished

Du Dieu de vérité faire un dieu de mensonge.

On the other hand, they were simply exercising the prerogative of the true poet, who can claim a special competence in speaking of divine matters: Non merita il nome di creatore se non Iddio ed il Poeta.

It is only when we bear these considerations in mind that we can appreciate the real purport of Milton's

And justifie the wayes of God to men.

(9)

His object was not, as usually understood, didactic.

(9) There is, of course, no lack of argumentative passages in Paradise Lost, e.g. III, 92 ff. But we must be fair to Milton. De Quincey, for example, after admitting that "no one was better aware than Milton of the distinction between the discursive and intuitive acts of the mind," goes on to read Milton the following lecture: "God must see; he must intuit, so to speak; and all truth must reach him simultaneously, first and last, without succession of time or partition of acts." What De Quincey fails to see is that not only God but Milton himself also does intuit. The difficulty was that although God might

Had he been concerned only with the rigid enforcement of
certain moral ideas,⁽¹⁾ he might have been well content to
use pagan deities, or some other such fabulous figures, in
the allegorical manner suggested by Boileau:

Minerve est la prudence, et Vénus la beauté.
Ce n'est plus la vapeur qui produit le tonnerre,
C'est Jupiter armé pour effrayer la terre;
Un orage terrible aux yeux des matelots,
C'est Neptune en courroux qui gourmande les flots.

If such had been his object, he would have realised the
necessity of enlivening his inert and prosaic theme with
harmless fancies of this sort:

Sans tous ces ornements le vers tombe en langueur;
La poésie est morte, ou rampe sans vigueur;
Le poète n'est plus qu'un orateur timide,
Qu'un froide historien d'une fable insipide.

But Milton, inspired by "that eternal Spirit, who can enrich
all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with
the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips

(Note (9) continued from p. 201.)

communicate with his angels by means of a spiritual
sympathy (P.L. VII, 203-05) even as He communicated with
Milton by an inner light, yet both God and Milton in
their communication with us have to use the more conventional
medium of language. Argument was not what Milton sought,
but what he was ultimately reduced to. His hope had been
throughout to make an overwhelming revelation which should
be immediately effective.

(1) As Spenser had been in the Faerie Queene.

of whom he pleases," need take little thought of such fears as these. He does not disport himself "en mille inventions," but no man was less likely to become an "orateur timide."

The deeper questions raised by this claim to divine inspiration are not our concern. Those who see in Milton nothing but the sectary of the seventeenth century may seek for parallels in the visions of Vane and the inner light of the Quakers. But those who wish merely to understand the literary significance of it all will find it best expressed in an author who would have cared for none of these things. "Non enim res gestae versibus comprehendae sunt, quod longe melius historici faciunt: sed, per ambages, deorumque ministeria, praecipitandus est liber spiritus, ut potius furentis animi vaticinatio appareat, quam (2) religiosae orationis, sub testibus, fides."

4.

This, however, is a digression. The discussions of the academies during the few months Milton spent in Italy may have introduced him to some of these topics, but the real study of the matter would come later. If Milton's

(2) Petronius: Satyricon, c. 118.

main intention had been, as we have suggested, to prepare himself for the practical affairs of life, we should expect the chief results of the journey to be seen in the formation of his political opinions. We might also expect to hear something of the religious reactions which this visit to the centre of the Roman Catholic faith produced in the mind of so earnest a Protestant.

It is certain, however, that it was not in the hope of gaining fresh spiritual experience that Milton visited Rome. He was proof against conversion and, on the other hand, he would have thought it a poor thing to go merely with the idea of strengthening his sense of the difference between his own attitude to religion and that of the Italians. Apparently he was quite willing to let religious questions alone so long as he was allowed to do so, but, once raised, he claimed the right to assert what he believed to be the truth. Whether the Catholic "allurements and baits of superstition" moved him to that "excess of scorn and laughter" which Sir Thomas Browne deprecated in some of his companions, or inspired him with that lordly pity which the same writer admired in himself we have no means of knowing. They certainly made no important impression on him.

Politics, however, he did wish to study, and certain references of his to Dante and Ariosto show that he was ready to profit by anything that the choicest wits of Italy could teach him. Possibly in his extreme resentment of misgovernment at home he had not stopped to consider that other countries might be in a worse plight, and he may therefore have counted a little too much on the political wisdom of the Italians. Perhaps he confused them with the men of a former age, the citizens of the great republics whose histories he had been reading. As the Aeropagitica serves to remind us, he was approaching the age when he could be no longer content "to sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics, which can never be drawn into use." Had there been aught in Italy to inspire him as the Revolution in France afterwards inspired Wordsworth, Milton surely would have responded as Wordsworth did:

Now was it that both found, the meek and lofty
Did both find, helpers to their heart's desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish;
Were called upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us - the place where in the end
We find our happiness or not at all.

But seventeenth century Italy was not a place

In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance.

Politically its condition was worse than that of England; and Milton had no difficulty in discovering the reason. If the sad state of England was, as he believed, due partly to the priestly domination of Laud, was there not in Italy an even greater domination of the same sort? The power of the priesthood obviously was the root of the evil. And this power was exercised in a way especially fitted to arouse Milton's anger. He could go where he liked and do what he liked, could visit academies and examine manuscripts. What irked him was that he was denied "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience" which he esteemed "above all liberties."

This, we may note in passing, perhaps helps to account for Milton's attitude to the Italian arts. Their music he admired, for music always had the power to carry him to heaven, so that, despite Cowper, there was nothing really incongruous in his supposing that some divine power spoke through the voice of Leonora Baroni. The poets also, Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto at least, had some notion of the divine power which raises men above the sphere of

earthly ordinances and claimed his respect by their protests against the deadly restrictions of the prevailing clericalism. But painting was in a different case. It was a subservient art, adorning princely palaces and the temples of idolatry. Michael Angelo may have had his anti-clerical urgings. He may ever, as the story goes, have painted a cardinal among the damned in hell. But his protest was not so obvious to later generations as Dante's specific citations by name.

Thus, for Milton, the greatest of Italian arts was but a type of Italian servitude. It was but another form of Inigo Jones's clumsy attempts to make mere pigments do what could only be done by the inspired voice of the seer. As evidences of their national culture, the Italians would take him to see their pictures. These could safely be exhibited. But Galileo, the man gifted with power to know, to utter and to argue, must be locked up as dangerous. Yet he, if the Italians had the wit to know it, was their true artist, and he alone of his countrymen was ever referred to in Milton's works by that title.

We see then that Milton's interests were not primarily aesthetic. He attached importance to the arts largely in the light of their social implications. "Ubi nullae vigent artes," he had already written at Cambridge,

"ubi omnis exterminatur eruditio, ne ullum quidem ibi viri boni vestigium est, grassatur immanitas atque horrida barbaries."⁽³⁾ The same theme recurs many years afterwards: "When the esteem of science and liberal study waxes low in the commonwealth, we may presume that also there all civil virtue and worthy action is grown as low as to a decline."⁽⁴⁾ Always his primary concern is for civil virtue: "Verum ego Italiam, non, ut tu putas, facinorosorum latibulum aut asylum, sed humanitatis potius, et civilium doctrinarum omnium hospitium et noveram antea, et expertus sum."⁽⁵⁾ It was not as one seeking personal renown in "the very critical art of composition," but as an exponent of these same civiles doctrinae that he came back, resolved "that what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I, in my proportion, ... might do for mine; not caring to be once named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that, but content with these British islands as my world."⁽⁶⁾

(3) Prolusio VII, P.W. (Symmons), VI, 186.

(4) History of Britain, P.W. (Bohn), V, 185.

(5) Second Defence, P.W. (Symmons) V, 228.

(6) Reason of Church Government, P.W. (Bohn) II, 478.

Important, however, as was the work of those who devoted themselves to the cultivation of the national literature, Milton admitted that theirs was indeed only the second place. Of greater importance were the labours of those who were concerned in the actual government of the state, whose business it was to form the morals of their people.⁽⁷⁾ This was the highest sphere of human activity, and consequently it was within this sphere that serious thought and earnest discussion were most required. Yet in Italy, dominated by priestly censorship, discussion of this sort was strictly forbidden, so that Milton could not sufficiently bemoan the "servile condition" into which the country had fallen.⁽⁸⁾ It was an offence against his most cherished Conv^cition. Henceforward, for Milton, this was the touchstone by which true religion might be known from the false. The form of Church government which commands his allegiance will be that which differs most from the Roman in imposing the least restriction upon the freedom of his thought and utterance.

5.

It was particularly unfortunate that Diodati

(7) Letter to Buonmattai; Reformation in England, P.W.II, 390.

(8) Areopagitica, P.W.II, 82.

should die at this time. He had occupied a unique place in Milton's life. Although brought up in the same austere Calvinism as Milton, his was an entirely different temperament from that of his greater friend. He seems to have been light-hearted and vivacious, fond of company and entertainment. These may have been very innocent characteristics, but it is unlikely that they would ever have gained Milton's entire approval had they not been found in one who was not only the friend of his childhood but also the representative of a family whose orthodoxy and unselfish devotion to the cause of religion was beyond question. For Diodati's sake Milton, even in the sixth elegy, cannot wholly disapprove of social gaiety. He prefers to think that he himself is peculiar, and that his own excess of virtue is no valid argument against another man's cakes and ale. No one but Diodati could ever have put Milton into this position. And Milton will go even further than this. So far is he from censuring Diodati for his easy-going habits, that he actually allows Diodati to censure him. Diodati was perhaps the only person who was ever willingly allowed to lecture Milton on the danger of taking himself too seriously.

Milton always attached great importance to his

own ideas and opinions, and during his stay at Horton he had plentifully increased his stock of both. So far, however, this had led to no serious eruption, for Lycidas is, Miltonically speaking, a mere rumble. If we seek to discover what had been the means of keeping his zeal in check, the likeliest suggestions will be, first, paternal guidance and common-sense rendered palatable perhaps by motherly tact and kindness, and, secondly, the gentle banter of Diodati. When Milton returned to England his mother was no longer there, and he did not resume his abode in his father's house. So much he had foreseen and was prepared for. But now Diodati too was gone. Hence that feeling of loneliness which now beset him and which showed itself in various ways - in the constant desire of the early prose works to find some one to confide in, and in the circumstance of his hasty marriage.

At Horton he had been carefully shielded from violent contact with the outer world. His first experience of the world of ordinary men was acquired on his Italian tour, and from that experience he returned with outraged feelings and heightened antipathies, only to find in England a set of circumstances only too well calculated to add more fuel to his indignation. The friend of Gill

had no reason to think more highly of Laud than of the Franciscan and Dominican licensers who imprisoned Galileo, and in the war now waged against the Scots Milton saw a deeply-laid plot to reduce England to the state of intellectual bondage which prevailed in Italy. In the absence of the moderating influences of his earlier days, and embittered even by his sense of loss and the break with his former way of life, we need not wonder that Milton's passion for reforming the world should break out in all its violence.

CHAPTER V.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL PAMPHLETS.

though brutish that contest and foule,
When Reason hath to deal with force, yet so
Most reason is that Reason overcome.
Paradise Lost VI, 124 ff.

1.

Milton returned to England at a time when great events were threatening, and with him he brought a determination not to be found wanting in the hour of need. He did not go back to his father's house. There is no reason to believe that any violent disagreement took place, and we know that even before the Italian journey Milton had thoughts of leaving Horton to settle in London. On the other hand, it is likely that the zeal of the young man awakened but a faint echo in the bosom of his father. John Milton senior may have had ideas of his own in youth, but he had reached an age which is suspicious of the revolutionary ideas of the younger generation, and especially of those which it brings back from abroad. Though seventeenth century Italy was not

such an object of terror to good Englishmen as France of the Revolutionary period, yet Italian ideas both in morals and in politics had always been suspect. Morally, Milton was obviously not at all like the "inglese italianato" of the legend, but politically his opinions may have been thorough-going enough to scarify a respectable scrivener. A scrivener may be artist enough to compose hymn-tunes and madrigals, but he must not allow his artistic hankerings to stand in the way of business. In him must be no bohemianism and none of that insouciant disrespect for established institutions which even the minorest of artists can feel, provided he have no settled profession to inspire him with a conservative devotion to the existing order of things. The elder Milton's Puritanism had probably become by now a matter of habit rather than of determination. It might still set him in a mild constitutional way against the government but it would shrink with apprehension from the more aggressive kind of dissatisfaction which his son professed. It is not surprising that the father should have preferred to take up his abode with the more circumspect Christopher, a man of law, despite the fact that Christopher's opinions were such as to cause him later on to take the side of the Royalists.

That Milton was for the time quite carried away

can easily be seen by the way of life he chose for himself. It was not that he was compelled by poverty to become a schoolmaster nor even that he wished to choose that form of occupation for which his academic qualifications best fitted him. Like Mr. Hardy's Clym Yeobright, he seems to have been enthusiastic and guileless enough to believe that he was embracing the most glorious opportunity of serving his country and his fellow-men. This is sufficiently evident in his tractate Of Education. His scholars were to be no metaphysical disputants trained after the obsolete mediaeval method which still prevailed at the universities, but sound citizens capable of playing a worthy part in the practical affairs of their country.

Yet his scheme was not wholly utilitarian. Rhetoric, for example, was to be studied, since Milton's conception of the management of public affairs owed more to the times of Demosthenes and those of Cicero than to the circumstances which prevailed in his own age. It is by insisting on the importance of oratory that he is able to reconcile his scheme of education with his essential mission as a poet. Thus, after the study of politics in the Grecian lawgivers, the Roman edicts and the common laws of England, his scholars were to pass on not only to choice

histories and famous political orations but to "heroic poems and Attic tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument," which, says he, "if they were not only read, but some of them got by memory, and solemnly pronounced with right accent and grace, as might be taught, would endue them even with the spirit and vigour of Demosthenes or Cicero, Euripides or Sophocles." The addition of these last two names is most important. Milton thinks it essential that his scholars should learn "what a glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry, both in divine and human things." So when they "speak in parliament or council, honour and attention would be waiting on their lips."

2.

And, meanwhile, what of his own glorious and magnificent intentions? The Cambridge manuscript makes no mention of the Arthurian themes which he had lately had in mind when writing the Mansus and the Epitaphium Damonis. It seems, however, that the idea of a national epic in the manner of the romances of chivalry had not yet ceased to trouble his thoughts. Thus in Of Reformation in England he urges the sister-nations of England and Scotland to

become "the praise and heroic song of all posterity," and views with consternation the prospect of engaging "the untainted honour of English knighthood to unfurl the streaming red-cross, or to rear the horrid standard of those fatal guly dragons, for so unworthy a purpose, as to force upon their fellow-subjects that which themselves are weary of, the skeleton of a mass-book."⁽¹⁾ In The Reason of Church Government also, he again represents the valour of his countrymen under the figure of knights solemnly vowed to the destruction of some "sail-winged monster" of iniquity.⁽²⁾

The Cambridge manuscript, however, makes it clear that chivalric romance was not his chief concern. The numerous subjects therein suggested were little suited to this kind of treatment. Most of them were obviously intended for dramas, and all were drawn either from British history or from the Bible. Perhaps the intention was to embody episodes from the early history and from the religious traditions of the nation in tragic form, just as the Athenian dramatists had done for their own people. Here a difficulty would arise: the religion of Hellas was closely associated with its own legendary history, but the religion of England

(1) P.W. (Bohn) II, 407, 406.

(2) P.W. II, 505.

was drawn from the traditions of another nation. What then was Milton to do? Was his story to be drawn from English history or from the Bible?

Why he should first incline to the drama at this time is not certain. It may have been suggested as a possible alternative by the discussions of the Italian critics, and, the question once raised, the authority of Aristotle may have helped to persuade him of the superiority of that form of poetry. Certainly Milton's travels in Italy seem to have modified his attitude to dramatic spectacles, for when he adds Lactantius's condemnation to a previous note from Tertullian in his *Commonplace Book*, he is now careful to record his own disagreement in terms which anticipate the preface to Samson Agonistes.⁽³⁾ Or perhaps it was that epic themes were harder to find; when one does occur he makes a special note of it.

A further reason may be suggested. In The Reason of Church Government Milton contends that "the spirit of men cannot demean itself lively in this body without some recreating intermission of labour and serious things." The magistrates therefore will do well not only to take thought concerning matters of doctrine and religious institutions

(3) Hanford: Chronology &c. (ut supra), p.297.

but also to endeavour to "civilise and make discreet our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent academies and the procurement of wise and artful recitations, sweetened with eloquent and graceful enticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance, and fortitude, instructing and bettering the nation at all opportunities." The suggestion that the procurement of wise and artful recitations should be one of the chief cares of government helps to explain some of the provisions for the training of good citizens in Of Education. But the passage which now concerns us most is that which follows: "Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive method, at set and solemn paneguries, in theatres, porches, or what other place or way may win most upon the people to receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in authority consult."⁽⁴⁾ The word "theatres" is introduced very cautiously and only after much preliminary beating about the bush. Milton has gone out of his way to disarm all opposition before he makes the suggestion. His obvious anxiety about the matter is easily understood in the light of the list of a hundred odd subjects for tragedy which he compiled about this time. These tragedies, it would seem,

(4) P.W. II, 480.

were intended for actual performance at those dramatic festivals which he hoped to see established in England on the model of ancient Athens.

This conception of the drama as of equal social and political importance with the more usual machinery of discourse and debate might also have been expected from the Education tractate. It recalls the coupling together of Euripides and Sophocles with Demosthenes and Cicero as the great teachers of civic virtue. Euripides and Sophocles, it may be noted, are the two dramatists specially mentioned in The Reason of Church Government. The omission of Aeschylus, if we may infer anything from a comparison with the more comprehensive list of epic writers, was probably intentional. This, from the creator of Satan, is at least strange, and the more so since Aeschylus is cited with the other two in the preface to Samson Agonistes and obviously influenced the form of that work in quite an equal degree. But it is probably not of questions of form that Milton is here thinking. The draft schemes of Paradise Lost in its dramatic shape do not, at any rate, suggest a very close approximation to either of the models which he professes. Apparently what he wished to revive was the social function rather than the aesthetic form of the Attic drama, and having

this in view it is not surprising that he preferred the enlightened Sophocles and Euripides to the more conservative Aeschylus.

3.

It pleases Dr. Johnson "to look with some degree of merriment ... on the man who hastens home, because his countrymen are contending for their liberty, and, when he reaches the scene of action, vapours away his patriotism in a private boarding-school." But we cannot share his mirth. If it were true, as he implies, that the whole of the Parliamentary party had now made up their minds, and that all except Milton were now vigorously employed in carrying out the grand design, this would be a matter rather for shameful regret rather than for jocose exultation. Johnson, however, does less than justice to the common-sense of the Parliamentary party, who, until the time when the military genius of Cromwell had made itself known, had little reason to suppose that their chief strength lay in force of arms. He is even more unjust to Milton, who was obviously no Dugald Dalgetty returning home at the report of warfare, because of the opportunities which war afforded to a man of his training. What inspired Milton was not the

prospect of a fight, but the moral courage which the Scots had shown in daring to fight.

In the events of the time, Milton read the signs not merely of a political upheaval but of a vast spiritual renaissance. Fighting was not an essential part of his expectations. When he wrote his earliest prose pamphlets he hoped that there would be no more need of arms. After their failure in Scotland he expected the government to perceive that military force was powerless to check that process of moral regeneration which was now stirring both nations. The great work of the age, as Milton conceived it, was to complete the movement begun by the Reformation. This was an enterprise not less but infinitely more heroic than the capturing of great cities or the establishment of mighty monarchies. Emblazoned shields and tinsel trappings might be used for so unworthy a purpose as to force upon one's fellow-subjects the skeleton of a mass-book. True heroism must be sought rather in the unadorned fortitude of those who resisted such attempts. "Go on both hand in hand, O nations, never to be disunited; be the praise and the heroic song of all posterity; merit this, but seek only virtue, not to extend your limits; (for what needs to win a fading triumphant laurel out of the tears of

wretched men?) but to settle the pure worship of God in his church, and justice in the state: then shall the hardest difficulties smooth out themselves before ye; envy shall sink to hell, craft and malice be confounded, whether it be homebred mischief or outlandish cunning: yea, other nations will then covet to serve ye, for lordship and victory are but the pages of justice and virtue." (5)

In the revolution as thus conceived no man had less difficulty than Milton in recognising the part he had to play, and none was more prompt in applying himself to his task. First, he was to train the young to heights of eloquence and civic virtue, and incidentally to imbue them with a feeling for great poetry. In addition to this, he was to inspire his countrymen with a sense of their divine mission by writing plays founded on the great traditions of their nation or of the faith which they were to re-establish. It was difficult to decide between these alternatives and apparently he had not yet made up his mind. In the third and most important of his projects, this difficulty had solved itself. If Britain was to be the praise and heroic song of all posterity, someone must write that song for posterity's benefit. And who more fit

(5) Reformation in England, P.W. II, 407.

than Milton whose whole life had been a preparation for such
(6)
a task?

Here the religious and the patriotic inspiration would be at one, for in this work which they had undertaken it was obvious that the English were Heaven's chosen people. "Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his church, even to the reforming of reformation itself; what does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen? I say, as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy." (7) In times past England has not responded as readily as she ought, but Milton well believes that she is now more fit for her great mission and requires "but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies." (8)

What more glorious and magnificent use could be

(6) Cf. the Preface to the first Defence, P.W. (Symmons) V, 38; (Bohn) I, 4-5.

(7) Areopagitica, P.W. II, 91.

(8) Ibidem, 92.

x "old" is the reading of the Amsterdam edition (1698) p. 274 and of Symmons I, 58. The Bohn edition has "whole."
The pagination of the Amsterdam edition is very confusing. After p. 270 only the right hand pages are numbered, apparently to accommodate the Divorce Tracts which seem to have been printed first and have a separate title-page dated 1694.

made of poetry than to set forth this divine scheme of regeneration wrought, under Heaven's special guidance, by the most highly favoured of all nations? This theme, Milton hopes, will not lack its inspired singer.

"Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measure to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land throughout all ages; whereby this great and warlike nation, instructed and inured to the fervent and continual practice of truth and righteousness, and casting far from her the rags of her ~~whole~~ vices, may ^{old} press on hard to that high and happy emulation to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people at that day, when thou, the eternal and shortly expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of the world, and distributing national honours and rewards to religious and just commonwealths, shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth; where they undoubtedly, that by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive above the inferior orders of the blessed, the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones into their glorious titles, and in super-eminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss, in overmeasure for ever." (1)

The "some one" here referred to may reasonably be identified with that one English poet who, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, had devoted some attention to setting his high strains to new and lofty measures. That Milton was only waiting for the full accomplishment of the

(1) Reformation in England, P.W. II, 418-19. Cf. Animadversions, P.W. III, 72.

last and most glorious episode in this great scheme before undertaking his Legende des Siècles or Sepmaine of the chosen British people may explain some remarks in the prose works. In An Apology for Smectymnuus, for example, he states that the achievements of his countrymen far surpass "those exploits of highest fame in poems and panegyrics of old,"⁽²⁾ and again in the Second Defence he asserts that a single exploit of theirs is matter enough for an ordinary epic. This one achievement he claims to have celebrated in true heroic fashion, though from sheer necessity he has been fain to pass by the rest. Then he goes on to encourage these worthies - whose deeds have already exceeded the powers of epic to describe them - to proceed to fresh triumphs, assuring them that "they are not lacking who can rightly counsel, exhort, inspire, and bind an unfading wreath of praise round the brows of the illustrious actors in so glorious a scene."⁽³⁾ But perhaps it was only in the cooler element of prose that Milton suffered for a time under the usual epic limitations.

4.

Thus he returned with rapture to his literary

(2) P.W. III, 147.

(3) P.W. I, 299-300 (translation).

pursuits calmly awaiting the issue of the struggle which he trusted to Providence and the representatives of the people. Now Parliament, in the exercise of the executive power thus magnanimously delegated to it, discovered that in practice the great obstacle to the realisation of Milton's hopes was the episcopacy. And liberty of speech being now restored, it soon appeared to Milton that this opinion was shared by the nation as a whole. This awakened his interest so that he wrote Of Reformation in England in which he gives what was intended for a general review of the events of the time. Like the Education tractate, this work is addressed to a friend, and would seem to be merely an expression of personal opinion on a matter of contemporary interest. Milton writes, so far as it was ever possible for him to write, as a detached but keenly interested spectator. He gives some account of the deep and retired thoughts which have aroused his interest in the question discussed, and professes an objection to all forms of "sensual idolatry" on Platonic grounds which would easily be understood by any man of culture. Then follows a historical survey of the course of the Reformation drawn from his earlier reading and intended to make clear the present position of the Church. He does not, however, expect that his inter-

pretation of these matters will command universal approval, and the restrained and quasi-academic tone of the pamphlet is emphasised by the way in which he now proceeds to marshal his imaginary objectors. It is true that his suggestion that libertines form an essential part of the opposing party is not tactful, and that his characterisation of the antiquarians is not sweetly reasonable. Yet it is something that Milton should for once take heed that there are whole classes of men whose training and whose practical interests will cause them to see things from a point of view essentially different from his own, and that he does, in some sort, seek them out on their own ground.

Milton's sympathy is obviously with the reforming party. But this alone would not justify him in the eyes of the more active adherents of that party. Sympathy without practical assistance will often be received with more of resentment than of gratitude by those who are heated in the strife. Such people cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed that never sallies out and sees her adversary. They cannot see beyond their present purpose. Lack of zeal is to them the worst of all offences. It would be easy for them to regard Milton as one who shirked the dust and

heat of controversy and preferred to dream away his years in the arms of studious retirement like Endymion with the moon; and we know that Milton was particularly sensitive to such criticism. Whether Young, who was himself engaged in the struggle, sought to enlist the aid of his former pupil, or whether his example was cited by others to the same intent, we know not. Maybe the only impulse came from an uneasy stirring of Milton's own conscience, though we can hardly doubt that Young's example had some influence upon him. We may regret his decision, but we can understand how difficult it would be to resist. The party which he favoured were likely to be overcome, not because they were wrong nor because they lacked courage. Truth was being overborne by a display of learning. Here then was a task eminently fitted for him. To neglect the opportunity might cause him afterwards eternal self-reproach. And so he obeyed the call and entered the arena with two works of a very different kind from Of Reformation in England, works intended not to win by persuasion the great variety of hypothetical objectors, but to belabour vigorously certain individuals who had advanced arguments on the other side.

This polemical purpose must be borne in mind if

we are to judge these pamphlets aright. It would have been presumptuous, as Pattison sufficiently indicates, for Milton to have engaged Ussher in a matter of pure scholarship. But that Pattison should therefore think it necessary to censure Milton on that account is indeed an excellent proof of Milton's own contention: that there are important questions which men of the highest scholarship may perchance fail to understand and in which their learning is but a darkening of counsel with words. Milton's hope is not to overcome his adversary with equal weapons (which may, or may not, have been beyond his wielding), but simply to disarm him. Ussher's patristic learning, he insists, has nothing to do with the question now debated. Church government is to be settled either by human or divine appointment. If human, then we have an equal right with the Fathers to settle things as seems best to ourselves. If divine, then we must seek our authority in the Bible and not in the Fathers. It was not necessary to Milton's case, though no doubt it added to the force of his argument, that he was able to impugn many of the deductions which Ussher had made from his authorities.

Pattison's solicitude for venerable scholarship thus assaulted by "the rude wantonness of untempered youth" is excusable; but it is like the fierce denunciation which

a true lover of art might pour down, without inquiring into the exigencies of the case, upon all military commanders who have damaged buildings of architectural merit. Must the enemy be allowed to keep a perfect observation post because he has chosen a particularly handsome spire for that purpose? Military necessity is Milton's plea. Great names may be "titled to false opinions" and great hurt may be caused by their "entrapping authority."⁽⁴⁾ He will not be intimidated in this way. He will not withhold his attack even when confronted with the name of Calvin himself - "as if," says he, "we could be put off with Calvin's name, unless we be convinced with Calvin's reason."⁽⁵⁾ To object that Milton's pamphlet contains "more of banter than of criticism" is to mistake his purpose. To Milton this was no academic discussion of the ecclesiastical antiquities of the patristic times. "The dust and pudder in antiquity" had been raised by the adversary "out of stratagem" and in his counter-offensive Milton was content to "observe some sort of military advantages, to await him at his foragings, at his waterings, and whenever he felt himself secure, to solace his vein in

(4) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 95.

(5) Animadversions &c., P.W. III, 73.

derision of his more serious opponents." (6) Such is Milton's apology, written however with special reference to the Animadversions rather than Of Prelatical Episcopacy. There indeed his task had been not to question the evidence collected by a great scholar but to deal with a merry fellow who twitted the Smectymnuans with the name of Legion for they were many and remarked on the fondness of wanton wits to play with their own sterns. Even the rude wantonness of untempered youth was capable of appreciating the difference between his two opponents. Yet essentially, when due allowance is made for circumstances, the purpose of both pamphlets was the same.

5.

We may well believe that Milton could find excellent reasons for writing these pamphlets. Yet they were not such works as he would willingly have written, had circumstances not demanded it. The preface to the Animadversions shows that he had rather more sympathy with the scruples of the "softer-spirited Christian" than we should expect if we could suppose the boisterous manner

(6) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 99.

of that piece to be entirely spontaneous. In excusing this "well-heated fervency", he points out that the force of the opposition comes not from its strength of argument but from self-interest and oppression. "They which thus offend against the souls of their brethren, do it with delight to their great gain, ease and advancement in this world; but they who seek to discover and hinder their false trade of deceiving, do it not without a sad and unwilling anger, not without many hazards."⁽⁷⁾ Against the powers which had oppressed "the subjects of Scotland, and our poor expelled brethren of New England," and in face of the "Gehenna at Lambeth",⁽⁸⁾ all weapons were lawful. But this state of things was now passing away. The mere fact that Milton's pamphlets were published shows that "equal liberty to write" was now enjoyed by both sides and that the opponent of episcopacy had no longer to bethink him "how he could refute the Clink or the Gatehouse."⁽⁹⁾ With the exclusion of the Bishops from the House of Lords, the great names of the other party had been robbed of some of their entrapping authority over the weaker-minded who cared only for success and pre-eminence, not at all

(7) Animadversions &c., P.W. III, 43.

(8) Ibid., 46, 50.

(9) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 135.

for merit.

He seems to have decided, therefore, that henceforth he could best help on his cause by writing of it in a style more worthy of it and of himself. In The Reason of Church Government he gives a reasoned statement of his views on ecclesiastical polity set forth in a style similar to that of Of Reformation in England. Here, however, he is no longer writing to a friend, and in addressing himself to the general public he feels that some sort of testimonial of good faith and some indication of his competence is required. Hence the lengthy introduction to Book II. "Neither envy nor gall," he declares, "hath entered me upon this controversy." He has no pleasure in these disputes, and would prefer to be storing up to himself "the good provision of peaceful hours." He represents himself, quite ingenuously, as one who has been endowed with special gifts by the Almighty, and who is anxious to make the best possible use of his talents by devoting himself to the noblest kind of poetry, which is "not to be obtained by the invocation of dame memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich^{with} all utterance and knowledge."

We can understand that one who professed such

aims might be in sympathy with any movement which promised to improve the moral condition of his fellows. Yet, in spite of Dr. Johnson, we might easily pardon him if he shrank from active participation in anything which would hinder the fulfilment of his own lofty schemes. Milton himself is inclined to think that he may have been unnecessarily inquisitive or suspicious of himself and his own doings, but he cannot help it. "This I foresee," he writes,

"that should the Church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me liberty the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed ... I foresee what stories I should hear within myself, all my life after, of discourage and reproach. Timorous and ungrateful, the church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies, and thou bewailest. What matters it for thee, or thy bewailing? When time was, thou couldst not find a syllable of all that thou hast read, or studied, to utter in her behalf. Yet ease and leisure was given thee for thy retired thoughts, out of the sweat of other men. Thou hast the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified; but when the cause of God and his church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listened if he could hear thy voice among his zealous servants, but thou wert dumb as a beast; from henceforward be that which thine own brutish silence hath made thee." (1)

It will be seen that this apology applies not only to the present work but also to the two anonymous

(1) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 475.

pamphlets previously issued. And one of these pamphlets - the Animadversions - was indeed received in such a way as to render some sort of personal justification absolutely necessary. The Remonstrant, whose Defence the Animadversions had attacked, now in his turn modestly confuted Milton by accusing him of being a frequenter of bordelloes who had been "vomited out" of the university after an inordinate and riotous youth. As Milton's own object in entering the controversy had been to damage the authority of certain "great names", we may think that he had little cause to complain when he was himself attacked. But at least he had made no such accusations as this, and moreover, from his point of view, the two cases were in no way comparable. He had not brought any great name into the debate to bias the argument by its entrapping authority, for his works had been anonymous. Therefore any attack made on him was entirely gratuitous; not a means of counteracting an unfair advantage but a means of setting up such an advantage on the other side. This device of covering a nameless adversary with opprobrium was but the necessary complement of the policy which commended one's own party by the dazzling glamour of established reputations.

It was not in Milton's nature to submit lightly

to treatment of this sort, particularly when he felt that in attacking him the enemy was really seeking to discredit the cause he held most dear. It would be galling enough to be twitted with his own obscurity as compared with Hall's accepted fame, but when the adversary sought to emphasise this advantage by inventing a most revolting figure of a haunter of bordelloes to set beside his "holy and religious prelate", this was more than Milton could bear. If the dispute was to be settled by a comparison of the literary powers of the disputants and of their freedom from crime, Hall's party could claim no advantage. But it would be somewhat difficult to make people realise this. Of the virtuousness of his own conduct Milton could speak as few other men could hope to do. In literature, however, he could offer only promises, though in a negative way he could do something by showing how far Hall's performances fell short of his own standards of excellence.

To do this sort of thing really well requires a prose style rather different from Milton's. The fault of the Apology for Smectymnuus is that its ponderous manner is suggestive of pious rage not of gentle malice. Thus it is possible for Johnson to complain of Milton's peevishness and inconsistency in objecting to the appearance of young

divines upon the stage, when in truth he is neither peevish nor inconsistent. His opponent of the clerical party had insinuated that anyone possessing so much knowledge of stage matters as is shown in the Animadversions must be a person of immoral character and, therefore, quite unfit to discuss church affairs. Surely, then, Milton was justified in replying that his knowledge was drawn from the plays acted in college by budding ecclesiastics. But in Miltonic prose what should be the retort courteous or quip modest becomes something more like the reproof valiant or countercheck quarrelsome, even - as Johnson will have it - the reply churlish. Another instance of this may be seen in those passages where Milton takes exception to Hall's works on moral grounds. These were not intended as serious literary criticism but as a reductio ad absurdum of the Remonstrant's method. If Milton himself had been accused of immorality on such evidence as this, he was within his rights in showing how much worse the Remonstrant's "holy and religious prelate" would appear when subjected to the same examination. But Milton's quarrelling in print was not done by the book; he knows not the art of being smooth with his enemy, nor the virtue of an "if". His style lacks the easy carelessness of a man who is pursuing a line of argument which he knows

to be fallacious. He is so serious that we cannot but believe him to be in earnest.

The more definitely literary criticism of Hall's work cannot be thus excused. To grave contemporaries seriously interested in the question under discussion the poetic value of the Bishop's satires must have appeared a trifling matter to introduce on such an occasion and its relevance would be difficult to perceive. But Milton's interest in the Smectymnuan controversy had lost something of its fervour. His mind had passed on to other matters, and with characteristic lack of adaptability, he insists on writing of the things which really do interest him at the moment rather than of those things which the circumstances of the case demanded. The whole tone of The Reason of Church Government and that of the Apology for Smectymnuus show that he had once more returned to his literary projects. He does not wish to be drawn again into a controversy which he considers closed. It was "with small willingness" that he endured to be "put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies" "to embark in a troubled sea of noises and harsh disputes." (2) He was

(2) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 481.

now engaged with such abstracted sublimities as required a
"still time when there shall be no chiding."⁽³⁾ If the
Remonstrant chose to draw him again into the arena, he
must not complain if Milton betrayed some impatience at
being interrupted in his more serious designs. Since
Milton had so little time to waste on these matters, the
enemy could not expect him to accommodate himself to the
paltry standards of the outside world during his brief
sojourn therein. He will return to the conflict, but he
will also bring with him that demand for absolute perfection
which he applied to himself. The Remonstrant had not been
satisfied with answering the Animadversions, but had busied
himself unnecessarily with the character of its author.
He should be made to feel what manner of man this author
was - not a "toothless satirist" after the fashion of Hall,
but one "rather nice and humorous in what was tolerable,
than patient to read every drawling versifier."⁽⁴⁾ Milton
is seriously annoyed that people should regard him solely
as a pamphleteer or should imagine that he has always time
to spare for controversy. He will let them know the kind
of world he really lives in, and incidentally he will show

(3) Apology for Smectymnuus, P.W. III, 121.

(4) Ibid., P.W. III, 140.

them what pitiable figures even their most eminent leaders will appear in that exacting region.

We may regret the attack on Hall, but we must be grateful to the Remonstrant who provoked it, since the same provocation called forth the fullest account Milton had yet given of the abstracted sublimities which engaged his thoughts. In the light of that exposition we are able to understand how Milton could write during the same year the sonnet When an Assault Was Intended to the City.

Regarding himself essentially as a poet, he expects other people to do so too. The true captain, or colonel, or knight in arms who really cares for deeds of honour will recognise like the great Emathian of old that poetry raises men far beyond the plane of mere political conflict. Milton's late excursion into pamphleteering, though laudable and necessary, represented but a momentary interruption of his chief business in life. Though he believed that his action had been justified, he was yet inclined to regret that his studies should have been disturbed in this way.

Not all of his readers, however, will share this regret. Milton, they may think, was rather too anxious to regulate his life according to preconceived designs. The strict régime of the Horton period, no doubt, served

its purpose; yet it would have been little to Milton's advantage to have been allowed to go on living always according to plan. He might still have been a fine scholar and a true poet, as were Gray and Arnold, but he would have been an "artificial" poet, one who never spoke out. And that Milton never was, after the appearance of his earliest pamphlets. The zeal for his cause has carried him away as he never was carried away before, except in one short passage of Lycidas.

"When God commands to take the trumpet and blow a sonorous or jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what conceal."⁽⁵⁾ He has no choice but to speak out, and in such passages as the great peroration to Of Reformation in England or the prayer in the Animadversions⁽⁶⁾ to which the Remonstrant took exception the "organ voice" of Paradise Lost is heard for the first time.

(5) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 474.

(6) P.W. II, 417 ff.; III, 71.

CHAPTER VI.

MARRIAGE AND THE DIVORCE PAMPHLETS.

All higher knowledge in her presence falls
Degraded, Wisdom in discourse with her
Looses discount'nanc't, and like folly shewes.

1.

After the Apology for Smectymnuus then, we may suppose that Milton intended to give up pamphleteering and resume his normal way of life. The Reason of Church Government is not a contribution to the strife but a sort of Religio Poetae put forth from the seclusion of his studious retirement, from whence also he wrote the sonnet When an Assault Was Intended to the City. For more than a year he abstained from pamphleteering altogether. Even when he did again appear as a controversialist he was not impelled to take sides on some question which was violently disturbing public opinion, but vented his feelings on domestic matters which affected him personally. He seems also from now onwards to have abated something of his assiduity in adding to the Ethical, Economical and Political

(1)
notes of the Commonplace Book, although occasionally
he may find things worthy of recording in the Italian
authors whom he has recommenced to read: Tassoni,
Boccalini, Berni and the biographer of Petrarch. It
is not surprising, therefore, to find him turning again
to poetry, and to that essentially Italian form of poetry,
the sonnet. When an Assault was Intended to the City was
followed by two others both written before the publication
of the Poems of 1645. Milton apparently has resolved
henceforward not to let other affairs obscure for a moment
his main purpose in life. Thus, though on the lower
plane of public controversy he disagreed with Lawes, yet
poetry owed a debt of gratitude to Lawes and it is as her
spokesman that Milton acknowledges that debt in a gracious
sonnet. His publishing of his earlier works in 1645 also
shows a new solicitude for his literary reputation. It
was obviously absurd to expect people to regard him as a
poet, when his poetry was the only part of his work that
they had no chance of reading. He has no desire to
achieve notoriety in controversy. He is a-weary of the
lingua procax vulgi, and would banish afar the turba
legentum prava.⁽²⁾ His audience must be fit and few.

(1) Hanford, ut supra, p.278. Cf. also p.303.

(2) Ad Joannem Rousium, 79-80.

Thus Milton had begun to learn that it was better for him to confine himself within a narrower and more intimate circle than that afforded by the world of politics. Real and substantial liberty, he saw, is to be gained from within not from without. The man who is constantly mounting the stage of arrogance sets all his store by outward appearance. He must forever keep up the attitude of bold and defiant leadership. Sweet reasonableness is not for him. Yet this sweet reasonableness seems to have had some attractions for Milton just at this time. The bookseller Thomason, for example, must have regarded the controversies of the time in a different manner from Young. And the Lady Margaret Ley had no cause to be a blind partisan. In Milton's sonnet to her we no longer hear the tones of youthful enthusiasm singing the bloodless triumphs of reason. The outbreak of the civil war has caused him to realise the dangers which older and wiser men had anticipated. Just when violence was becoming the accepted order of the day, Milton seems to have grown tired of the tongue-doughtiness which played upon so many of his own sex and to have cultivated the society of women as never before. Two of his sonnets are addressed to them besides that to the memory of Mrs. Thomason. In none of these is there any of the theatrical

falling in love of the earlier Latin and Italian verses. There is, however, the implicit realisation that women are an essential element in society, and that the qualities of courtesy, moderation, and forbearance which were now so sorely needed were most likely to flourish where they were present.

That man's intellectual sanity should be in woman's keeping was certainly something new to Milton, (3) and may have suggested doubts about his own way of life. We are not surprised therefore that he should have decided on a change. His marriage was sudden, but, when once convinced, Milton was not likely to waste time unnecessarily in putting his convictions into action. What is hard to explain is the sequel. A month after the wedding his wife left him and then refused to return. That she should have departed with her husband's consent is perhaps remarkable, but even more remarkable is the possibility that The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce was published before her return was expected.

2.

We have practically no evidence at all for

(3) Cf. Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, P.W. III, 213.

forming an estimate of Mary Powell's character. Because Milton said in his haste that some women were mere images of earth and phlegm, are we justified in referring to her as a "dull and common girl"?⁽⁴⁾ Yet despite this lack of evidence critics have been almost unanimous in regarding her as a very ordinary person, though some of them have suspected her of somewhat extraordinary behaviour. It is well to remember that this unanimity rests on no certain basis, and that Mary Powell may in fact have been quite different from the lady usually presented to us.

The earliest accounts of Milton's domestic troubles are worthless. Phillips, admittedly, was living in the house at the time, but it is not likely that Milton would explain these things to a pupil even though it were his nephew. If little Edward were too persistent in inquiring why Aunt Mary did not return, he would be given the most plausible and least harmful explanation, whether it were entirely true or not. The tale circulated by the early biographers is perfectly obvious: Milton, the dour Puritan, marries the gay and frivolous daughter of a Cavalier family, but she soon tires of his rigorous way of life and takes the first

(4) Mark Pattison: Milton, p.56.

opportunity of leaving him. It is altogether too simple and straightforward, just what the neighbours or the servants would say.

Sage and serious men have been carried away before now by the careless vivacity of young girls, and the results have sometimes been unhappy. But if this were Milton's case, it is remarkable that the hypothetical sufferer of The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce is never attracted in this way, but always by "bashful muteness" and an "appearance of modesty." And what was bashful muteness doing in a "roystering home, frequented by the dissolute officers of the Oxford garrison"⁽⁵⁾? It is precisely in such surroundings that this maiden virtue reaches its sublimest heights. In a mild Victorian state of society it is regarded as tame and commonplace: it is the accepted standard expected from every woman. There is nothing heroic about it, nothing to fire a girl's imagination. The true mark of precocious girlhood is the need to rise superior to the moral standards of the ordinary men folk of one's family and acquaintance. Nowadays those standards are often despised as too narrow; in the seventeenth century they were likely to be considered too broad. At all events

(5) Ibid., p.53.

the seventeenth century produced a number of women who embraced ideas of impossible pudicity with great emotional fervour.

When a lady of this frame of mind meets a man in whom is no sign of the coarseness which she associates with his sex, she is apt to take a sentimental interest in him and even to fall in love, not with him, but with a certain ideal man conceived in his image who hath bought a pair of cast lips of Diana and whose kissing is as full of sanctity as the touch of holy bread. No man was better fitted for the part than Milton. Doubtless the tributes of his Italian friends are exaggerated, but their insistence on his virtue shows at least that the Lady of Christ's had lost none of her original brightness. Moreover there are stanzas in Francini's ode which might be applied in all propriety to the author of Paradise Lost, though scarcely to any other writer, so that they cannot be mere empty compliment, and we must believe that there was to be seen in the Milton of this time something beyond what he had yet put into his verses. Italian compliments may have been cheap, but there was surely something remarkable about a man who could be described by other men as uomo celeste or as one "in cuius virtutibus evulgandis ora Famae non sufficient, nec hominum stupor in laudandis satis est."

And that something must have been of a kind most apt to engage the attention of young ladies of seventeen, in whom the faculty of rhapsodical admiration is often developed beyond anything we can imagine even in Italian men of letters.

We know at least that it was possible for a virtuous young lady in the prime of early youth to expect from Milton that understanding which was not to be found in those around her, and that the situation of this high-minded maiden could command his sympathy and encouragement. ⁽⁶⁾ But such sympathy does not always inspire the persecuted one with new strength

(6) The sonnet in which this lady is addressed must be dated after November, 1642. It comes before that to Lady Margaret Ley, which also was published in 1645. Phillips suggests that the acquaintance with Lady Margaret came after the separation, and she was certainly a neighbour of Milton in March, 1644 (Smart, p.160). The sonnet was therefore composed either shortly before or shortly after his marriage. I cannot think that he would have inserted the reference to the Bridegroom immediately after his own marriage, since it might suggest a ludicrous and blasphemous misinterpretation. Most probably, then, the sonnet was written between November, 1642, and Milton's marriage in June, 1643.

The reference to the Bridegroom must be connected with "that place" in Revelation (xiv, 1-4) mentioned in the Apology for Smectymnuus. Evidently the lady was one who by chastity aspired to enjoy hereafter "the unexpressive nuptial song" of Lycidas, the immortales hymenaeos of the Epitaphium. At all events Milton's intimacy with a lady who had such views is important. I cannot accept Smart's suggestion that she might be a daughter of Katharine Thomason. If she had been brought up in a pious household, why should the members of the household fret their spleen because she has chosen the better part with Mary and with Ruth? The inference seems to be rather that she belonged to a family where the others followed the broad path and the green.

Often the discovery of a kindred soul will make it harder henceforward to bear the uncomprehending barbarism to which one had previously become almost inured. Vulgar people moreover are fond of indulging their mirth at the expense of the male confidants of virtuous damsels. And so, as Milton was not averse from marriage, and had even now thoughts of settling down to a permanent way of life, he would glow with generous indignation and proceed to rescue the lady from her unworthy surroundings. Yet in all this, his respect for her bashful muteness, no doubt, would prevent him from ascertaining whether she approved as heartily as he did himself of that which God and nature intended as the end of marriage.

Hence came the shock. The lady found that the idol she had so unwarrantedly conjured up to herself was in fact no more than a man of like passions with his kind. Probably she was led to say harsh things about Puritan hypocrisy. How dare a man possessing natural abilities and honest desires deceive a wretched girl by observing common decency in his normal habit of speech? She preferred the open blackguardism to which she was accustomed: it was at least straightforward. That she refused the consummation of the marriage is not certain: it would

be sufficient to hint that she regarded submission as an indignity. If Milton discovered in his wife "the unfitness and defectiveness of an unconjugal mind," he would not press to be admitted to a "brutish congress" of "carcasses chained unnaturally together." This placed him in an impossible position. He was not really married, yet he had not the right to marry. The law might recognise the husband's right to his wife's body, but not to her mind, and Milton himself understood that "to command love and sympathy, to forbid dislike against the guiltless instinct of nature, is not within the province of any law to reach; and were indeed an incommodious rudeness, not a just power."

Thus then we can see what Milton intended in The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, and can understand moreover why that work has been so variously interpreted by its different critics. The end of marriage which Milton proposes is essentially humane: a wife is to be "an intimate and speaking help, a ready and reviving associate."⁽⁷⁾ But this "sweet and gladsome society" is denied to him who is "fast bound to an uncomplying discord in nature, or, as it oft happens, to an image of earth and phlegm."⁽⁸⁾ Where

(7) Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, P.W. III, 191.

(8) Ibid., 194.

one partner is discovered to have a mind "unmeet and unsuitable" and inaccessible to "due conversation",⁽⁹⁾ such a union is impossible.⁽¹⁾ The insistence on the need for intellectual harmony is comprehensible. But when the pamphlet fell into the hands of an "unswilled hogshead"⁽²⁾ who knew nothing of "the gentlest ends of marriage" nor what was meant by a "fit conversing soul,"⁽³⁾ we are not surprised to find Milton confuted in this fashion:- "We believe you count no woman to due conversation accessible, as to you, except she can speak Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French, and dispute against the canon law as well as you." No wonder that Milton longed for a "man equal to the matter" to take it in hand. Had this "cock-brained solicitor" possessed the wit to read his author aright, he would have found that Milton's demand was not for an unnatural sophistication but a simple acquiescence in the most natural of human instincts. Milton indeed seems so anxious to justify sexual union as an essential (though not the principal) end of matrimony, that a modern critic

(9) Ibid., 192, 190.

(1) Ibid., 206, 214.

(2) Colasterion, P.W. III, 459.

(3) Ibid., 449, 453.

has been led to the other extreme, picturing him wrecked in the "sensual whirlpools" and supposing that the qualities of the lady's mind were of no account whatever. ⁽⁴⁾

3.

The catastrophe of his marriage, it has been suggested, brought home to Milton the pressing needs of the flesh and the necessity for reconciling the claims of passion with those of reason. This suggestion, however, has the defect of crediting Milton with too much of the ordinary man's powers of self-criticism - with the power, that is, of gaining wisdom from experience and of learning thereby to doubt his own self-sufficiency. Such a view underestimates Milton's powers of resistance,

Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single.

Disappointment only served, apparently, to stimulate him to passionate self-justification. His conduct throughout, so he conceives, has been guided solely by reason, and if he emphasises the necessity for sexual intercourse it is not as an emotional satisfaction but as an intellectual safe-

(4) D. Saurat: Milton, Man and Thinker, pp. 49 ff.

(5)
guard. This severely rational conduct of his had brought him into conflict with the law and with public opinion. The law, therefore, and public opinion must be illogical and absurd. The world at large must change its views, not Milton his. It is quite unlikely that any man equal to the matter will dare to defend the received opinion, but if any such can find an argument to advance in its favour other than the "old and rotten suggestions whereon it yet leans," Milton promises to discuss the matter in all civility.

And to do him justice we must admit that the divorce pamphlets are not the work of blind passion, quarrelling with the natural order of things and displaying the usual topsy-turby dialectic of oxymoron. There is no vestige of the mood of odi et amo or of "Two loves I have of comfort and despair." Neither Catullus nor Shakespeare could hope for a remedy from the law, but Milton's is a case which law can alter. Milton was not of the stuff which makes Catulluses or Shakespeares. For him, comfort is the prime condition of love, and as soon as despair comes

the god of love, anon,
Beteth hise wynges and, farewel, he is gon! (6)

(5) Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, P.W. III, 213.

(6) "Then straight from that dwelling, love, which is the soul of wedlock, takes his flight, leaving only some cold performance of civil and common respects." Tetrachordon, P.W. III, 359-60.

And as he feels not the overpowering force of passion, so does he seem equally ignorant of its sordidness. Of "sensual whirlpools" Milton knows nothing. If his passions alone had been engaged he might, in his first revulsion of feeling, have lightly proceeded to abuse the whole female part of creation in the manner of Shakespeare's Leonatus or his own Adam. But nothing disturbs for a moment his clear conviction of the necessity of women. They are no mere accidents intended to add to the beauty and joy of life as they had been in some of his earlier poems. They have become an essential part of Heaven's provision for man's well-being on earth. But unlike other objects created to that benign end, women have wills of their own, and it is sometimes difficult to secure and to retain their very necessary goodwill and co-operation. Within certain bounds this state of things may be found tolerable and even pleasant. Obviously, however, there was something wrong that which was intended as an aid to man in his great work refused unconditionally to be won to his service, or by setting her whim above his sober judgment even hindered him in carrying out that work.

In an earlier work Milton had shown some impatience with those who "run questing up as high as Adam to fetch their

original;"⁽⁷⁾ but in the divorce pamphlets he has to admit in some sort the legitimacy of arguments drawn from that remote epoch. One may deny that Adam was the first prelate, but not that he was the first husband. Yet Milton is careful to insist that the conditions of Paradise no longer apply in our present fallen condition: "It will best behoove our soberness to follow rather what moral Sinai prescribes equal to our strength, than fondly to think within our strength all that lost Paradise relates."⁽⁸⁾ The memory of that lost Paradise should teach us not to make impossible demands upon our fellow-men but to provide such "merciful and life-giving remedies" as "shall restore the much wronged and over-sorrowed state of matrimony, ... as much as may be, to that serene and blissful condition it was in at the beginning."⁽⁹⁾

Thus then we can perceive something of the significance which the lost Paradise now began to acquire for Milton. He had first considered the story of Adam and Eve at the time when he was seeking biblical and

(7) Reason of Church Government, P.W. II, 449.

(8) Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, P.W. III, 241.
Cf. also pp. 237, 240, 249, 252.

(9) Ibid, P.W. III, 183.

historical subjects for his dramas. Adam was the one biblical personage whom the Gentiles might claim as an ancestor, and his adventures had the hypothetical advantage of uniting the biblical interest with the national. But this connection was too remote to inspire English people in the way Milton desired. It gave England no more part in the divine scheme than any other nation, whereas, to Milton, this was a people chosen specially by the Lord. He understood that it was not by such subjects as this that Englishmen were to be inspired to great collective efforts. He realised, in short, that Adam was no true "epic" hero in the Homeric sense - a truth which has since been somewhat over-emphatically rediscovered by some of his critics. But he now came also to realise that the story of Adam should be of the utmost importance to every man individually. To the aspiring it should represent the "blissful condition" to which human life ought, as much as may be, to be restored; even the less sanguine cannot help having some interest in it since they too bear in their daily life the dire consequences of Adam's fall and are perpetually reminded of all they have lost thereby.

The Paradise Lost therefore will not be a poem of the Homeric kind, and it will differ from that kind not

because of its greater artificiality but by reason of its equal authenticity. For the age of Milton was not the age of Homer. The unit of thought was no longer the herd but the individual. Tribal traditions in matters of kingship and religion were being condemned by the convictions of individual consciences. Tribal lays, therefore, could no longer satisfy the human spirit in matters concerning the supreme questions of man's existence. For an author in the seventeenth century to write an Homeric epic would be artificial indeed: the authentic epic of the new age will differ from the Homeric in seeking to interest man as man and not as a unit in a society.

4.

This new phase of epic development is the product of the Renaissance and Reformation. There is no hint of it in Dante, for example, but there is in Spenser. The Divine Comedy is autobiographical in form, but its appeal is not to the individual. Dante writes not for man as man but for man as a unit in that society known as the Catholic Church. Spiritually men are to be dragooned in masses in accordance with the orthodox opinions

of Catholic theology, and as it pronounces lastly on each deed of so much fame in heaven or of other things elsewhere can they expect their portion. In Spenser, on the other hand, the individual is everything. Despite his occasional bursts of patriotism, his Faerie Queene is not a national epic. Though he writes expressly in praise of his sovereign, his homage is paid to her as a woman rather than as the ruler and representative of the nation. He seeks to tell, not of mighty conquests - for then it had been better for his knights to have combined forces in the manner of ancient epic - but of the fashioning of "a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Virtue, for Spenser, must be nurtured from within, not imposed from without. It can be developed by intense personal experience but not imparted by doctrine nor enforced by prohibitions. Hence his knights, for the most part, pursue their quests unaccompanied, and assisted only by divine grace. Thus it is a matter of some importance that Milton should now proclaim Spenser "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas."

This respect for Spenser as a teacher does not imply that Milton wholly approved of the method of the Faerie Queene. Rather the reverse. For though Spenser's

moral was deep and serious, his stories are fanciful. Like Coleridge at a later date, Milton may have felt that there is something incongruous in a fanciful poem which inculcates a serious moral, though of course he would approach the problem in a spirit more Wordsworthian than Coleridgean. He would willingly sacrifice subtlety of imagination in the interests of moral profundity. He coveted not

The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
but preferred with "sympathetic heart" and "soul of power"
to run a more sober race. Not that all in the Faerie
Queene is mere magic; it has surely enough of human
experience even in its story to touch any sympathetic
heart. But it is experience of a limited kind. None
of Spenser's characters, ⁽¹⁾ it might almost be said, has
experiences which normally develop profundity of thought
or of spiritual vision. His world is a world of fairy
tales where good people live happily ever after, and where
indeed they have nothing else to do as soon as they are
married. Romantic fiction has no use for the married man. ⁽²⁾

(1) Except Guyon. Milton's preference for this part of the Faerie Queene is significant.

(2) The Odyssey is the general exception to all generalisations.

Milton, however, knew of a certainty that the experiences of married men are of the utmost importance.

There is nothing essentially novel in this, and the point to be made in Milton's choice of subject is not its modernity, as of an Ibsen or a Strindberg, but its serious common-sense of the sort seen, for example, in The Pilgrim's Progress and the Book of Job. The case of Job is particularly apposite - the good man made miserable through no fault of his own, yet condemned by the vulgar prejudices of those about him. Milton cannot conceive that a man's salvation should be endangered by giants, enchanters and monsters that hinder him in his service of a beauteous maiden, but he can well understand that a man's wife could tempt him to curse God and die. It is important, therefore, to notice that he had already come to regard Job as a model of epic poetry, though of a kind of epic different from Homer's and Virgil's.

In The Reason of Church Government, Job had been distinguished from the others by reason of its brevity. This was the most obvious point of difference, but we may suppose that it had other claims than this upon Milton's attention. It was, for example, a much sounder authority than Tasso for the use of Christian machinery. But this was not all. In

his Education tractate, it will be remembered, Milton had divided tragedies into two kinds: those that treat of household matters and those of stateliest and most regal argument - those, that is, that treat of man as an individual and those which are concerned with him as a member of society. The latter were to be considered at the same time as epic poems, with which they had much in common. For the accepted models of epic, the Iliad and Aeneid, themselves belonged to this second class. But Paradise Lost was not to be of this type, and Milton by now had realised that his proper sphere of thought was domestic rather than civil. This may be one reason for his dallying with the idea of tragedy, even after he knew that the dramatic festivals he had hoped for would never take place. The domestic kind, he knew, could be done in tragic form, but it had not been customary in the epic. There was, of course, the Odyssey, but Milton seems not to have been greatly influenced by that. The poem which most strongly pointed to the possibility of an epic which should sing

the better fortitude
Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom

rather than

Wars, hitherto the onely Argument
Heroic deem'd

(3)
was, beyond all doubt, the Book of Job.

Milton, like Job, had been tempted to repine unto atheism, but his trial had taken a different form. Job's difficulty had been that of believing in God's goodness and care for the righteous when he himself, a righteous man, was so badly treated. Milton's is the difficulty of understanding why a righteous and loving God should command a man to cleave to his wife when his wife may be quite capable of making it impossible to cleave to her. It was Milton's habit to think Miltonically. The true function of human life, as he conceived it, was precisely that function which he had set himself - to bring forth some great and glorious work acceptable to the Lord. That work might, as in his own case, be a great poem or it might take other forms, but - almost inevitably in that age - it was more likely to be brought about by man than by woman. Woman's part in the business was indirect. She was not created first as part of the prime purpose, but "after made occasional" to satisfy the needs of man. Milton allows that "particular exceptions may have place, if she exceed her husband in prudence and dexterity, and he contentedly yield: for then a superior and more natural

(3) Cf. Eikonoklastes, P.W. I, 396. "But Job used no such militia against those enemies, nor such a magazine as was at Hull." Note also the reference to Job in Doctrine and Discipline, P.W.III, 200.

law comes in, that the wiser should govern the less wise,
whether male or female."⁽⁴⁾ Such cases, however, he
supposed were rare, and certainly he could never regard
himself as the inferior partner. His divine mission
was a trust for which he was directly responsible to God.
He could not fulfil his purpose on earth mediately, by
ministering to his wife. Consequently it was her duty
to help him. She must live, that is, for God in him.

But his wife apparently was not so completely
convinced of his divine calling as was Milton himself.
Moreover she laid claim to the knowledge of good and evil
and dared to correct Milton's own notions on such matters.
In a world where such things can happen, a man can cleave
to his wife only at the cost of abandoning what he knows
to be right. Here, then, the ways of God to men obviously
needed some justification, and that justification Milton
found in the story of Adam. In the state which God
intended, man would have suffered none of these inconveni-
ences. It was not intended that mankind should presume
to argue of good and evil. When our Maker bade increase,
no one would have thought of promoting the devilish and

(4) Tetrachordon, P.W. III, 325. Cf. Doctrine and Discipline, P.W. III, 247.

hypocritical doctrines of abstention. But this happy state has passed away solely because of man's folly in listening to the voice of woman rather than to his own conscience.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INDEPENDENT.

Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshak'n, uneduc'd, unterrifi'd.

1.

Milton's first pamphlets had been written in support of the Presbyterians. The aims of the Presbyterians were not really the same as his, but they had at least the same immediate object. This fortuitous agreement helps to account for the style in which the early pamphlets were written. The existence of a considerable body of public opinion apparently seeking the same goal as himself convinced Milton that mankind as a whole were really anxious to behave reasonably. If any still clung to the other party, that was simply through lack of instruction, and there should be no great difficulty in showing them the true state of affairs. The sort of instruction required was obviously not particularly deep

or recondite. The need for reform should be almost self-evident to all men when once they have been urged to consider the question. And not only does Milton believe that people will be thus easily persuaded, but he cherishes also the idea that there is a sort of essential goodness in all men which will cause them to take the matter up with all their energy the moment the true state of things is laid before them. The perfectability of mankind has been hindered in its progress not by any essential wickedness in human character but by the bad influence of certain evil institutions.

Hence in these writings Milton's manner is that of the over-confident party journalist. He is as cocksure as Macaulay. Here we have no doubting and curious inquiry into fundamental questions leading up hesitatingly to a few cautious suggestions which are set forth with many fears and scholarly warnings. The atmosphere is not that of the study, but of the market-place at election times. The tones we hear are full of jubilant exhortation and fiery zeal uttering catchwords and denunciations such as cannot fail to move the magnificent superiority of the election-audience. Such appeals derive their cogency not from a severely ordered system of thought, but from the acceptance

of certain customary prejudices and popular conventions. The Milton who wrote thus had not worked out his position. He was not a reformer urging a scheme for the complete re-organisation of affairs. He sought simply to protect the existing liberties of society against encroachment. If he went so far as to desire to abolish the episcopacy, this was no startling innovation. Prelacy was no necessary part of the existing system but an incongruous survival from other days by which the present organisation of society was in-⁽¹⁾commoded and even endangered.

In the divorce pamphlets he was carried beyond this position. No longer does he seek to stabilise the existing state of society by a trifling simplification in its organisation. He has been led to attack one of society's fundamental conventions. He cannot now appeal to the common prejudices of his audience; he must reason things out from first principles. Whereupon his audience, loving convention more than reason, was moved to horrified denunciation. Milton's resentment of these attacks shows only how little he understood his former associates. He and the Presbyterians had once been brought together, as he conceived, not because their paths though different in direction had

(1) Cf. Reformation in England, P.W. II, 403 ff.

happened to cross, but because they had manned together the same impregnable eminence of truth. Consequently when they parted company with him he could only think it was because they had strayed away from that lofty position.

Since this apparently regenerate portion of mankind had failed him when put to the test, Milton's tacit belief in the goodness of human nature was shaken. What he had mistaken for zeal was mere cunning and self-seeking. Mankind, he sees, is not made bad by institutions. Its badness is native to it and the moment its old institutions are taken from it, it will begin to erect new ones equally vicious:

New Presbyter is but Old Priest writ Large.

When it suits their hypocrisy they are fain enough to sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics, yet the Platonic arguments of the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce leave them unmoved. In future Milton will know how to deal with them. He will not profess the highly edifying but ineffectual notions of a merely literary politic, but will work earnestly at such imperfect measures of improvement as may be accomplished "in this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably."

No longer does Milton ply with catchwords the intellectual sufficiency of the British public. Among the Presbyterians were many who could do that sort of thing: mere A.S. and Rutherford, shallow Edwards and Scotch What d'ye call. With the loss of his easy faith in the goodwill of mankind he has come to doubt the honesty and executive ability of all logic-chopping demagogues. He therefore no longer instructs the people of England to accomplish a task which no mouth-driven populace has ever been capable of performing. More sensibly he lends his whole-hearted support to the men who were really capable of doing something.

Milton, of course, did not elaborate any such doctrine of Heroes and Hero-Worship as that afterwards propounded by Carlyle, yet he seems to have realised that the great need of the times was a Hero in the sense which Carlyle gave to the word. It is thus that Cromwell is presented in the Second Defence.

"We were left," says Milton, "to ourselves: the whole national interest fell into our hands, and subsists only in your abilities. To your virtue, overpowering and resistless, every man gives way, except some who, without equal qualifications, aspire to equal honours, who envy the distinctions of merit greater than their

own, or who have yet to learn, that in the coalition of human society nothing is more pleasing to God, or more agreeable to reason, than that the highest mind should have the sovereign power. Such, sir, are you by general confession; such are the things achieved by you, the greatest and most glorious of our countrymen, the director of our public councils, the leader of unconquered armies, the father of your country; for by that title does every good man hail you with sincere and voluntary praise." (1)

That Cromwell should be regarded as a hero a century and a half after his death is quite in the manner of things; but that he should be thus recognised by a contemporary is not in accordance with one's experience of the ways of the world. Johnson, who knew this pettifogging everyday world as well as most men, was very properly shocked by Milton's servility. Caesar, says he, had not more elegant flattery than Cromwell received from Milton. Nor Augustus, a later critic was disposed to add, encomiums more heartfelt and sincere. (2) Julius or Augustus is, however, all one for our purposes, since Augustus did but complete what his predecessor had begun, and in the most sincere and splendid of Augustan encomiums they are both equally remembered. The dictator Julius, like Augustus, was a hero to Virgil much in the same way as the dictator Cromwell was to Milton. Each of these men

(1) Dr. Johnson's translation.

(2) Garnett: Life of Milton, p.120.

showed great capacity in the art of ruling and each owed his position as ruler to his own ability to make himself ruler.

Strength of arm and power to enforce one's will are even now regarded as admirable qualities in a ruler; but we do not encourage everyone who possesses some measure of this power to prove his fitness for the highest office by letting us taste of his sufficiency. And it is precisely for this reason, we are told, that the more civilised ages do not produce great epic poems. The great age of the epic was the age when such qualities bore undisputed sway, and when their usefulness was universally recognised. It is surely a mistake, however, to suppose that ever since the time of Homer the world has been afflicted by that unenterprising timorousness which we ourselves profess. There have been great social upheavals when men of heroic might were the only possible rulers, and there have been authors to extol them with true Homeric complacency. To assume that heroic virtue disappeared with the Homeric age is both unscientific and uncritical. It is unscientific since nature does nothing per saltum, and it is surely not good criticism to pretend that the essential quality in Homer consists in something which

has now departed from the face of the earth. The only kind of heroism of which literature can take any account is that which is a permanent element in human nature. This may, on inquiry, be found to consist in something more than proficiency in man-slaying; if so, we may perhaps be allowed to acknowledge as a truly epic responsiveness to the heroic even that of the poet who was so little disposed to follow a mere war-chief as to make pacisque imponere morem the final test of greatness, or of him, not less, who could remind Cromwell in his hour of triumph:

peace hath her victories
No less renown'd than warr.

Some indication of the change in Milton's views (3) is found in the first four books of the History of Britain. Though still concerned for the welfare of the British nation, he has little faith in its native virtues. The English are prone to "vicious ease" and will even love a tyrant (4) whose vices sort with their own. They must be saved in spite of themselves.

(3) Written before March, 1649. Perhaps begun c.1646. Cf. Hanford: Milton Handbook, p.89, and Firth: Milton as an Historian (British Academy, 1907-08).

(4) P.W. V, 250, 247.

"For Britain, to speak a truth not often spoken, as it is a land fruitful enough of men stout and courageous in war, so it is naturally not over-fertile of men able to govern justly and prudently in peace, trusting only in their mother-wit; who consider not justly, that civility, prudence, love of the public good, more than of money or vain honour, are to this soil in a manner outlandish; grow not here, but in minds well implanted with solid and elaborate breeding, too impolitic else and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and virtue either of executing or understanding true civil government." (5)

3.

It was Milton's habit to endeavour always to move what he touched, not to lament unceasingly that in this imperfect world there was nothing clean or beautiful enough to be touched by hands so delicate as his. Accordingly he thought no shame to enter the service of the Commonwealth. In Cromwell lay the last hope: if Milton could do aught to aid him in his task, he would not fail to do so. Like his leader, the poet had to undertake some unpleasant work, but, like him also, he never forgot that a commander's first duty is to his followers, who must never be made to suffer by reason of his own personal susceptibilities. There is nothing creditable in being magnanimous at other people's expense. One may respect the dead, but if the enemy uses

(5) Ibid., 240.

a dead body as a shield or as a rallying-point, the responsibility for its mutilation is his. In matters of life and death there are no rules of the game. When fighting for one's life, one does not ask one well-groomed gentleman to hold the watch and another to see that one never strikes one's opponent except in the proper place on pain of disqualification. Eikonoklastes and the two Defences are not manuals of good manners; but then, a man would hardly sacrifice his sight to produce works of that sort.

It was not in Cromwell, however, that Milton's hopes were to be realised. He had lost faith in the inherent virtue of his race, and had come to see the need for a strong ruler. But still to him the beating down of the proud and obstinate was but a mere prelude to the infinitely more important task of imposing the ideals of peace and enlightenment. He retained his old belief in learning and wisdom and manifested an exaggerated confidence in their immediate power to influence the life of the nation which could hardly be shared by an experienced leader like Cromwell. It was inevitable that Milton should be disappointed. Even in the Second Defence there are signs of uneasiness not only in the strict injunctions

which are bestowed on Cromwell, but in the particular commendation of the wisdom of certain other republican leaders whose opinions were not quite those of the Protector. The tribute to Milton's personal friend Overton is particularly significant.⁽⁶⁾ There can be little doubt that the subsequent imprisonment of Overton greatly⁽⁷⁾ affected Milton's attitude to Cromwell.

Yet though, by the time of Cromwell's death, he may have altered his opinion on the merits of the dispute⁽⁸⁾ between Cromwell and the Long Parliament, Milton could not bring himself to believe in that assembly as he had in Cromwell. Obviously the "miscellaneous rabble" must have some sort of authority set over it, and now Cromwell was gone there was only Parliament on which he could base his hopes. Yet within himself he knew how little it could achieve, and his attempts to inspire and dignify it by his flattering addresses are pathetic. He cannot recapture the tones of Areopagitica:

(6) P.W. I, 292-93.

(7) See Smart's edition of the Sonnets, pp.90-91.

(8) Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings, P.W. III, 2; Letter to a Friend, P.W. II, 103. Cf. History of Britain, P.W. V, 236 ff.; Second Defence, P.W. I, 285.

"Lords and commons of England! consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit; acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to." (9)

Even his admiration for "the old famous parliament" is subject
(1)

to some reservations. It is no longer an easy matter to make "a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and
(2)

of worthies." Milton is reduced to such phrases as "as I thought, and still hope well" or "if there be that saint-
(3)

ship among us which is talked of." He is trying hard to convince himself that his nation has not quite lost the right
(4)

to liberty.

Whatever parliament or nation might do, it was quite certain that Milton himself could entertain no thought of flight or foul retreat. On the very eve of the Restoration he had the temerity to publish his Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth. He must have realised that his appeal would be unavailing, but he wished to give his people every possible chance of redeeming

(9) P.W. II, 90.

(1) Letter to a Friend, P.W. II, 103.

(2) Areopagitica, P.W. II, 92.

(3) Letter to a Friend, P.W. II, 103, 105.

(4) History of Britain, P.W. V, 308, 393. Cf. Second Defence, P.W. I, 298.

themselves. It was still within their power to save themselves if they would but listen -

Had Judah that day join'd, or one whole Tribe,
They had by this possess'd the Towers of Gath,
And lorded over them whom now they serve.

But Judah chose rather bondage with ease than strenuous liberty and Samson was left alone - yet with rousing motions in him which disposed to something extraordinary his thoughts. Though he had failed to liberate his people, he could yet show the Philistines that the God of Israel was not lightly to be derided. It was not by relating the crowning achievement of his Englishmen that God was to be justified. Milton's Légende des Siècles will show rather how from the very beginning man has proved himself unworthy of all that God has done for him.